

Something Blue

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Something Blue

by [Lapin](#)

Summary

Thorin marries Bilbo after the Battle of Five Armies, a marriage of convenience, not love. Slowly, they must come to make the best of it, Bilbo resolves. After all, he's a Hobbit. They make the best of things.

Notes

A/N Inconvenient marriages hahaha, oh god I need to sleep.

I am conveniently located at [The March Rabbit](#). Just go ahead and click the 'Fandom' tag, ignore the insane drunk ramblings. Unless that's your thing. Personally, I'm used to being pointed and laughed at. I don't mind.

But that Tumblr there is good for prompt submissions, general questions, random spoilers and excerpts, and private criticisms if you don't want to leave them here. I don't mind. I just like it when people talk to me.

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [藍婚\(Something Blue\)](#) by [salicylate](#)
- Translation into Русский available: [Something blue](#) by [saerma](#)
- Translation into Polski available: [Restricted Work] by [kivutio](#)

Chapter 1

The book is too big for him, so he's forced to let it sit on the stone bench, while he sits cross-legged beside it. His terrace has great curved wings that swoop out and protect him from the wind, tapering down until he has his clear view of the valley below, a bad fall stopped by the stone wall that edges around it.

The beds have long ago withered and died from lack of care. He needs new soil, he knows that much, and the book says right away he's going to need wood ashes if he expects to grow anything in the mountain's natural soil. He'll need straw too, to keep the soil moist.

Well, there are stables in Dale, and he supposes he can use the ash from his fireplace and the rest of the royal apartments, if he can find a maid to ask. A maid who will talk to him, instead of looking at her shoes and bobbing up and down uselessly before scurrying away.

He twists the ring on his finger. It's too big, and it still bothers him a bit to wear.

A few vegetables and herbs wouldn't go amiss, he decides. He's missed a bit more variety at meals, and if he has his own supply, he can perhaps wheedle something a bit more complicated out of the cooks. Or they might even let him use the kitchens himself, if he can somehow make it sound more like an order than a question. The kitchen for the family isn't too busy, the boys and Thorin keeping to lunch and dinner with whoever is more important today.

Vegetables, he decides firmly, for the more protected beds in the sheltered area. The great big one in the centre though, that'll be a bit more tricky. Some hardy things like fennel and thyme and mint, that would be more practical for that one.

And for the bed that circles with the far wall, some ivy or hedges or both. If he's careful, he could start a few trees up here, once he gets the soil a bit more matured and steady. An apple tree, that would work well, once it had the shelter and warmth of other plants.

He likes the ideas of a few flowers as well, but he wants to consult the other book, the one the Men from Dale sent up, first. He doesn't want it to look like a hodgepodge after all. A garden needs to be planned, and planned carefully.

But he does like this plan, so far. He closes his book, and uses it as a desk, of a sort, for his paper, so he can sketch out the plans. *Sugar-snap peas*, he writes, in the bed by the wall, and imagines them climbing up it, getting to eat one fresh off the vine. It's not Bag End, he thinks, with a heavy heart. It will never be Bag End, with his green door, and his mother's flowers, no matter what he does.

He has to make the best of things though, he thinks, as he twists his ring. They all do.

He picks up his book with no small amount of effort, and takes it inside, where he drops it on a low bench by the glass-paned doors that lead outside. Frivolous, and far beyond his means,

had he still been just a Hobbit from the Shire. But he wasn't anymore, and there was little that was beyond his means now. He scarcely had to express a desire, when it would appear.

His rooms, for example. They had not been meant as a living area, before Smaug. Dís had told him it was a receiving room, meant for family guests. But Bilbo had longed for sunlight, in Erebor's darkness, and had fallen in love with these ones. So Thorin had, without asking, had them refurbished and changed, until they were an acceptable set of apartments for Bilbo. What had been the receiving room was now his sitting room, and the room connected his bedroom. Thorin had likely made no small amount of threats to get it done so quickly.

It had occurred to Bilbo, at one point, that his father had built Bag End for his mother. And so he too has been given a home. It had a nice symmetry, when one looked at it that way.

He spent his evening drawing up his plans, and compiling a shopping list for himself. It would be a nice chore for himself, a good excuse to leave the family apartments and interact. He'd go down to Dale, he decided, and talk to the shops there, not the ones in Erebor. It would put him out in the sunshine, or even the rain, he didn't mind, and he'd have himself a walk down by the lake, if the weather was fine.

It was not Bag End, but he'd make the best of it.

It isn't as though he has much choice.

The morning dawns bright and sunny, so he rises early, and dresses with a smile on his face. To get to leave the mountain is a treat not often had, not with all the business lurking around every corner, demanding attention. Even the boys are caught in it, forced into lessons like schoolchildren on everything from proper dress for dinner to the correct and very different ways to address the head of the Jeweler's Guild and the head of the Miner's Guild.

So far, he's not noticed much difference in their behaviour.

His own presence is required far more than he's comfortable with, meant to entertain spouses and friends and minor royals when Thorin is busy, or Dís declares open and unending hatred for their continued grasp on life. He's been told by Balin that Kíli, being the second-born, is supposed to assist him with this sort of thing, but it's been by mutual agreement between the lot of them that that is perhaps not the best course of action for smooth diplomatic relations.

Uncomfortable he is, but not ill-suited. He's dealt with enough unpleasant relations with a smile and an offer of tea more times than he can count, and if he can sit through a dinner with Lobelia Sackville-Baggins at her worst, he's more than capable of handling some fussy wife of a high judge. Truthfully, even if he was ill-suited, he'd still do his best, for Thorin's sake, if nothing else. The whole situation has been awkward enough, he'll not make it any worse by being remiss in what little is asked of him.

He would prefer to make his trip alone, but he knows Thorin would be furious if he tried, and Dís would be worse, so he allows an escort. He's a young thing, some distant cousin of Dwalin's, but not Thorin's. He will never understand the family lines, he thinks, as he orders him to follow at a distance.

A distance becomes all of three feet, the lad thinking he's being sneaky about it.

Bilbo resolves himself to it with only a little disappointment, and finds what he needs in the markets. He has an order of straw put in as well, preferably from someone's stables, with written orders for the guards at Erebor's gates as to where they should take it when it arrives.

“Trying to garden up there?” the shopkeeper asks, an older woman tall even for her kind, Bilbo thinks. “You'll need some good soil, or nothing will take. Stuff up there is too thin for anything but weeds.”

“What do you suggest then?” he asks, eager for advice from a local, and she asks for the layout of the place. He's brought his favourite of his plans, so he rolls it out for her, and gives her an idea of the size and the shelter. “I could get some kind of irrigation system set up, from my chambers, you see, this sits right at my apartments, and the plumbing is working very well there,”

“Aye, that part was probably mostly untouched. Damned wyrm,” she sneers, like most still tend to. “You'll need a system of some kind. Can't rely on the rains in the summer, that far up, and it'll dry out faster up that high. I could take a look, if you like, and if you don't, I still have a good compost that'll do the trick for you.”

He's not sure how Thorin would feel about him having a Man in the family apartments, but he really doesn't know what he's doing with this system, and if he has two guards in the room, Thorin can't claim any kind of foolhardiness. Besides, it'd be nice to have a visitor who didn't have a political agenda of some kind that he could discuss roses with.

“I think that would work quite nicely,” he says, and they negotiate a fee and date while the guard at his back stares off in boredom. “A pleasure doing business,” Bilbo says, but before he can extend his hand to shake hers, she gives a small curtsy, inclining her head, and he remembers.

“As with you, your Highness,” she says, and he fidgets at the title just a bit, his hand reaching for the ring, to twist it just a little, as though he can forget it's there.

He takes his leave of her, awkward now, and unsure of what else he could possibly do down here. He always forgets that he's the only Hobbit here, so he can't be mistaken for anyone else. The Men of Dale are allies again with Erebor, but there's still a caution there that will take more than a few months to resolve, or even a few years. They want to appease Thorin, and Thorin wants to appease them, as much as Thorin ever wants to appease anybody, and it makes for a strained relationship between them.

It would have been better, he thinks sometimes, if Thorin had done as he should have, and married someone from the town like what had been suggested by Balin and the other advisers. Of course, everyone knew that *Thorin* and *sensible* were two words that did not go together, more often than not, and instead, it's Bilbo who wears Thorin's ring. An entirely insensible choice, and yet, it had been Thorin's plea to him.

He has ever been very good at resisting Thorin, not from the very beginning.

He makes a few other purchases, indulgent things like ripe, red strawberries grown in the hothouses, and fresh cream for them that he could likely get in the mountain if he asked. He misses cooking and baking, misses being able to flavour every dish to his own taste, misses sweets especially. He thinks of this, and indulges more, thinking of baking a cake, a small one. The thought of candied violets and roses has him longing for summer, and a full garden. It would take another year, but he could still have them, and he can settle for nasturtiums and Johnny-Jump-Ups in his salads until then.

By the time the sun tells him that it's noon, he knows he needs to head back. He can't risk being away for too long. However, he has a fine new set of gardening tools and his less practical purchases, so he still feels bright when he enters the darkness of the Gates. The guard carries his things for him, as he's been told is proper, and well, Bilbo sees no time like the present.

He spreads a few strawberries out on a handkerchief, and eats them in between tilling the earth in his garden beds, getting the air in and finding that they're deeper than he thought, at least two or three feet. Deep enough the plants he intends to grow can establish deep roots and hold themselves steady in the wind and stay alive in the winter, deep down. Yes, he thinks, as he reclines on the stone bench made for someone twice his size, filthy with dirt, *this will work out*. He'll at least have this place, in this great dark mountain, with the green and the sunshine and the sky and the earth.

He doesn't hear Thorin come in, nor does he hear him enter the terrace. Thorin makes his presence known by hovering over him with a raised eyebrow, arms clasped behind his back. "What are you doing?"

"Gardening." Bilbo answers, sitting up. "Strawberry?"

"No." Thorin sits beside him, his court armour creaking. "I hear you went into town today. What were you up to?"

"I bought seeds, and arranged for a master gardener to come help me build an irrigation system for this." He waves his hands, then nods at his tools. "Bought those."

Thorin frowns, and rises to inspect them, like any Dwarf. Whatever he finds displeases him, and Bilbo waits to see just what his protest is. "If you had only asked," Thorin says, with that air of patience that was actually hiding his complete impatience. "I would have made you a set myself."

Bilbo sighs. "You're a king, Thorin."

"And you are my husband." Thorin says, with that same air, the one that makes Bilbo lean back on his hands and wait for the inevitable wave of hurt pride. "Any tools you would use should be forged by me, and no one else."

"Do you work at being this ridiculous?" Bilbo asks, swinging his feet. The bench is too high for him, even made at dwarfish height, but he's getting used to it. "You're a king, Thorin."

“I’m a smith.” Thorin replies hotly. Bilbo’s bruised his pride, and now Thorin’s set on having his way.

“Then forge a set yourself, if it makes you happy.” Bilbo concedes. “What brings you to my rooms this evening, Thorin?”

Thorin visibly bristles. “Do I need a reason to visit my husband in his rooms?”

“It wasn’t an accusation.” Bilbo says, wishing he had thought to bring his pipe outside. “It was only a question.”

Thorin sits back down beside him, sulking, but not badly. He’s angry with something, but it’s not Bilbo, so he tries to be a good husband, and asks, “What’s bothering you?”

Thorin exhales heavily, and leans forward, his elbows on his knees. “Dáin is coming back.”

“Didn’t he just leave?” Bilbo asks, standing, but only so he could walk the short distance to the table he kept his tin of pipeweed on, his pipe in its stand beside it. He packed it, and lit it, then re-joined Thorin, his king still staring moodily off into the distance. Bilbo sits beside him, then takes a puff, and offers it. He suspects Thorin has no intention of returning it, but he supposes he needs it. He’s tense, now that Bilbo really looks. “Why is Dáin coming back?”

“He wants to negotiate for more of his troops stationed here in Erebor.” Thorin exhales a smoke ring, then, to Bilbo’s surprise, he passes the pipe back to him. “I suspect that what his generals really want is to be back in Erebor.”

“Like everyone else?” Bilbo asks, taking a puff. They’ve had many Dwarrows eager to return to Erebor, pouring in through the gates in droves, all looking for their own houses, left abandoned all those years ago. He’s seen many a tearful reunion since the re-taking of Erebor, of families lost to one another, finally back in the homes they had built. “Can you blame them?”

“No,” Thorin says, taking back the pipe. “But I do not like the idea of generals loyal to Dáin stationed here. I do not know them all. I do not *trust* them all.”

Bilbo nods. “I would say that you were being insanely paranoid, but I’ve had the unfortunate honor of meeting his advisors. They’re not pleased with Fíli, or Kíli.”

“I don’t blame them for Kíli,” Thorin says, shrugging. “Sometimes, that boy makes me wonder...”

“There’s nothing wrong with Kíli.” Bilbo looks out at the setting sun, and settles back a bit more. “He’s just young. He’ll find his way, eventually.”

Thorin gives him a look.

“I did say eventually.” Bilbo winces when an unfortunate movement twists an overused muscle in his back unpleasantly. He’s gotten a little soft, here in Erebor. He can already feel the blisters forming between the joint of his thumb and his index finger, but he’ll callus quick

enough. “And Fíli is a good choice. He’s shown a good head for diplomacy, even if he dislikes it right now.”

Thorin just shakes his head. “I don’t worry about Fíli. I worry about Dáin’s aspirations.”

Bilbo tries to stretch his back a bit, but decides a hot bath will do the trick better. He’ll draw one after Thorin is satisfied. “Does he have any claim?”

“He’s a cousin, of some sort. Distant, but still a Durin, and he’s proven himself a good leader. Some say I should name Dáin my successor and Fíli might be his, but...” He trails off, and looks at a loss. “Am I being stubborn?”

“You’re always stubborn.” Bilbo reminds him. “It’s why we’re married.”

He means it in jest, but it rankles Thorin somehow. The ease of the mood is gone, and now Thorin stands in what Bilbo would call a huff on anyone not a king.

He’s very regal, Bilbo thinks, in an absent sort of way he’s never been able to repress.

“Is it?” he asks, imperiously. “Is that why we’re married?”

Bilbo sighs, and pinches the bridge of his nose in frustration. “No. We’re married because you wanted a Consort you could trust, not whoever they tried to force upon you.”

It’s harsh, but it’s the truth. In the days after the battle, they had hardly had a day of peace before the idea of Thorin marrying started to be thrown around by the Men and the Dwarrows, the idea that Thorin should secure their new alliances by choosing a spouse from amongst them. It had not taken long for the fighting to start, over where said spouse should come from, but before it had progressed much further, Balin had found Bilbo, and informed him that Thorin requested his company.

He had made the offer with still-shaking hands, clear-headed and in obvious pain. “I may yet die, my friend,” he had said, his breath laboured. “So perhaps I would make you a widower before long, if you accept the offer. Either way, the matter will be settled.”

There had been a foolish part of him that wished Thorin was asking because it was what he truly desired. A very, very, foolish part of him that he had quickly crushed, instead taking his friend’s hand, and consenting.

The story had been industriously circulated by all, that the king had fallen in love with the little Hobbit during the journey, that he wished to spend his days with no other. That they had a bond no one could dare break. That Bilbo, of all people, was Thorin’s *One*, a word they all spoke with a kind of awe Bilbo didn’t much understand, at first.

He did now, of course.

He also understood it to be a blatant lie of the worst sort.

“Do you trust Dáin like you trust Fíli?” Bilbo asks, before Thorin can work himself up into a strop.

Thorin seems torn. “Dáin is an honourable lord,” he says, but Bilbo just quirks an eyebrow.

“That is not what I asked you.”

Now Thorin sits down heavily beside him again, his boots flat on the ground. “No. I do not.”

“Then Fíli is your heir, as he’s always been, Mahal help us all,” Bilbo replies matter-of-factly. “Do us all a favour and try to stay alive for at least another fifty years. Preferably more.”

Thorin chuckles, deep and low, and it warms Bilbo to hear it. “You think it will take that long?”

“I’m hoping it will only take so little.” He gets another deep laugh out of Thorin, and he finally settles back beside Bilbo, relaxing at last. Heavy is the head that wears the crown, or so say the tales, and Bilbo has seen how true it is in his interactions with Thorin. He has no doubt Thorin tosses and turns at night, thinking of all he must accomplish in the day, all he has failed at. He is a good king, from what Bilbo can see, or at least tries to be.

“This is why I married you.” Thorin says, when the air starts to chill. “You provide me peace of mind when no one else can.”

It’s a compliment from someone who rarely gives so much as a kind word, and the fact it’s bestowed upon him makes it all the more pleasing. “Glad to know I’m of some use.”

“You are always of use.” Thorin stands, and shrugs off his outer layer, the coat lined with fur, and drapes it over Bilbo. It smells like him, and if Bilbo inhales a little, just a little, that’s his business, thank you very much. “Ridiculous creature. You’re too small for this weather.”

“It’ll be warmer soon enough, and I’ll have a proper garden to sit and smoke in.” Bilbo says, not bothered. Thorin’s right, he is too small for this weather. He’s too small for this mountain, this marriage. Yet he’s made it work well enough so far, by waiting patiently for warmer weather. He’s been rewarded so far, with Thorin’s friendship, and he’ll hopefully be rewarded with carrots and roses as well. “What do you think of tomatoes?”

“I like them sliced, with pepper.” Thorin shrugs. “Are you planning on growing tomatoes?”

“Of course. It wouldn’t be right, a garden without tomatoes.” Bilbo clucks at Thorin’s ignorance. “Like a king without a crown,” he goes on, teasing just a bit, and Thorin really is in a good humour now, because he smiles at it. “Oh yes, I’ll have tomatoes and sugar-snap peas and some very nice flowers. It will be quite lovely, when I’m done.”

“You want no help?”

Bilbo scoffs. “I’m sure I can manage.” He hopes so, at least.

“The Consort to the King Under the Mountain, *gardening*. Do you ever go anywhere without causing a scandal?” Thorin asks, teasing as well.

“I’ll have you know I was a very proper Hobbit before you, thank you very much.”

Thorin grins behind his beard, long enough now he's begun to braid it again. Finally, he has allowed himself out of mourning, and it makes Bilbo happy to see it. Thorin is healing at last, after all these years. "Then you have my apologies, my dear burglar." He looks around the terrace, bare still, but not for long. "This pleases you? Your rooms? Your garden?"

Bilbo sighs, and wraps himself a bit tighter in Thorin's coat to ward off the chill. "It does. Thank you for them." Thorin's coat is warm, and heavy, and wonderful, and it lulls him into a half-asleep state, his hard day finally catching up with him. "They were a kindness."

"They were not given out of kindness." Thorin says, and Bilbo snaps out of his comfort. Oh, yes. He'd almost forgotten, when they were sitting like this. Almost.

He stands, and gives Thorin his coat. "Forgive me, it's been a long day, and my back calls for my bath." It's rude and abrupt, but Thorin says nothing about that. He takes the coat back with an unreadable look in his face, and nods his good-night.

Even in the bath, with the hot water run, he can still smell Thorin, from where the coat touched his clothing.

Oh, he is such a silly creature, he admonishes. He is a ridiculous creature indeed.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The days go by faster, at least, with his garden to work in, though he's not able to spend as much time as he'd like in it. He gets himself a few books from the library, with Ori's help, and spends the days preparing for Dáin's arrival by reading up on the family lines and connections. Dáin is indeed distant, but still in Durin's bloodline, and according to the rather dusty tome on succession, he does have a legitimate claim on the throne, even if Fíli is closer in the line of succession than him. His prowess in battle, his record as a leader, and his own wealth make him a contender with some weight. Fíli is still young, and has lived too long in exile. He has fewer battles under his belt, and only the one great one.

It's all a bit disheartening, or would be, if Bilbo wasn't a Hobbit. He's been given a funny look more than once for being a Took, and his father had dealt with worse, marrying one like he had. Fíli is who Thorin wants, and Fíli it will be, if Bilbo has anything to do with it.

If only Fíli could be made to behave in a manner fitting his station.

“No.” Bilbo admonishes. Kíli skulks behind his brother like a scolded dog. “What is the matter with the pair of you? Have you lost your minds? Or has what little common sense you have finally fled from your empty skulls?”

“Was only a joke,” Fíli says, but even he seems to realize how much trouble he's in, or would have been in, had Bilbo not caught them with the bucket of sour milk, the lid clamped on tight. “They never would have known it was us.”

“That's not the point, you little idiots!” Bilbo hisses. “The point is you would have ruined any chance we have at negotiating with them. We would have been lucky if they had only gone home and not demanded some kind of punishment meted out! How would you feel, knowing someone eventually would have had to take the blame for you two?”

Now they both shrink a bit, perhaps finally understanding just why Bilbo is so furious with them.

“Get rid of it, now!” he orders, waving his hand in the direction of the outside. “And make yourselves presentable. Your uncle will be back shortly, and if you two look like you just came in from a tavern brawl, he'll have you both by the beards before you can recite the precious metals.” When both boys pause, perhaps expecting more, he just barely restrains himself from raising his voice as he whispers, “Go! Now!”

They turn tail and hurry to do as they're told before Bilbo finally snaps and does the job for Thorin.

Once they're out of sight, he sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. He wants his tea and he wants his garden, and he wants his bloody husband to return already and handle this. He's the

king, not Bilbo, and they both like it that way. It works that way.

But Thorin still hasn't returned from the scouting party, and he's starting to worry they've found something. Thorin's never one to be late, not for this sort of thing, and they'd ridden with three of Thranduil's own, so they couldn't possibly have gotten lost out in the forest.

He places a hand on the stones, and looks out over the bustle of Erebor. The gates are open, admitting the sunshine and their soon-to-arrive guests, but not his husband or the party. His stomach clenches as he thinks of what could have waylaid him, what could keep him from Erebor. The thought of Thorin dead is enough to make his heart beat as hard as a drum, painful in his chest, so he pushes it aside and focuses on something a little less dramatic, like the dinner for the visitors. Lamb, he decides, when the cook asks, if only because it's not hard to find, and it'll please them all, he hopes. By the time that's done, it's time for tea.

His husband has still not returned.

He takes his tea in his garden, unable to focus on it at all. He's well and truly worried now, no hiding it. Dáin is set to arrive very soon, but Thorin's arrival is still not announced. The scouting party has found something, that much he knows for sure at this point, but just what they found, he can only imagine, and oh, can he imagine.

A raven circles overhead lazily in the blue sky, then dips down, to perch on the table. There's a scroll attached to its leg, and it holds it out, impatiently waiting for Bilbo to get it off. He ends up having to use his little pocketknife, the string is so knotted, and once it's free the raven takes flight again.

Orcs. Am unharmed. Slow travel back, injured. Nightfall.

The vice around his heart loosens, and he takes his first deep breath since he realized how late Thorin was. They've encountered stragglers before, and there've been far too many skirmishes for him to ever be easy when Thorin, or the boys, go out with the scouts or patrols. Thorin's uninjured, at least, though someone is. He tries to remember who was with him in the party that morning, but no familiar faces come to mind. No dead, Thorin would have said, so there's that.

“Your Highness?” Balin is at the door, a twinkle in his eye, like there always is when he addresses Bilbo in such a way.

“Please stop calling me that.” Bilbo groans, folding his message up and tucking it away in the pocket of his jacket. “Has Dáin arrived then?”

“Yes, along with Thorin's missive. You'll have to receive our guests, with Fíli. We'll leave Kíli out, since Thorin isn't here to keep him in line, and his mother is still in the Guild Halls,” Balin says as Bilbo adjusts his coat, making sure he looks presentable. Thorin's ring is shining on his finger, but he gives it a quick rub with his handkerchief, just in case. “You understand the situation with Dáin and his lot?”

“As well as can be expected.” Bilbo replies, satisfied with his appearance. “Does Fíli?”

“No, Thorin thought it best for the boy to not know just yet. He’s no good at subtlety, in any case, so it’s likely for the best we keep him in the dark, at least for now. If Dáin and the rest prove a bit aggressive, then we will, so he’s prepared for any backstabbing from supposed friends.” Balin guides him out, the guards at the door trailing them as they make their way down the hall.

Fíli is waiting, a bit green around the gills, but he smiles when he sees Bilbo, and he at least looks the part of the crown prince. His hair is braided nicely, as is his beard and moustache, and his clothes are neat and clean again. He’s even wearing the right swords, the lovely set Dáin had sent him as a gift. It’s a polite gesture, even if Kíli teases him for how pretty they are.

“Uncle will be delayed?” Fíli asks him, not fidgeting, thankfully.

“Yes, so be on your absolute best behaviour. I mean it Fíli, not so much as an off-colour joke, am I understood?” Balin warns, wagging a finger at him. “Or I’ll tan your hide myself.”

“I can behave, thank you,” Fíli replies waspishly. “Dáin’s council is unbearable though. I don’t know how you stand them, Bilbo.”

“I’ve had the pleasure of tea with their spouses, Fíli,” Bilbo reminds him, not looking forward to the future repeat. They had all been stiffly polite, each more self-important than the next, at least in his company, but he imagines they had not much liked having to address him as *your highness*. “Your uncle says he’ll return by nightfall. They have injured and it’s slowing the party.”

“At least it’s not him,” Balin says, shaking his head. “That would be quite a welcome for Dáin, Thorin bleeding all over the place.”

“A memorable one, at least,” Bilbo replies, earning a chuckle from Balin and Fíli both. “Is Kíli disappointed at being excluded?”

“He’s firing arrows at squirrels from the gate, sulking.” Fíli shrugs. “He’ll be all right in a day or so, once he remembers just how dull it all is. He has to attend the meals, after all. He just gets in a strop when he remembers he doesn’t get to be king.” He preens at the word, and Bilbo and Balin exchange a rueful look. Thorin had better keep his promise, is all Bilbo can hope. Perhaps in another fifty years, Fíli might yet be bearable.

“Yes, how fortunate you managed to be born first.” Balin says. “Quite a feat, that. One wonders as to why you are not buckling under the weight of all your honours.”

Fíli takes a minute, then scowls. “I’m still crown prince. I can tell you what to do.”

Balin gives a short bark of laughter, and walks ahead to announce them, chuckling to himself.

“I could,” Fíli insists to Bilbo. “If I was serious, he’d have to listen to me. You know it’s true.”

Bilbo shakes his head. “Now is not the time for your games, Fíli. You and I stand in place of your uncle right now, and if you conduct yourself in a lesser way, you'll be shaming him more than yourself, understood?” This, a blow to Fíli's unquestionable love and borderline worship of Thorin, gets the desired result. He stands straight, his play at hurt feelings replaced by a more firm expression, a more adult one. He's a handsome boy, when he tries, and he'll be a good king one day, if Bilbo has to drag him to it by his hair. “Be polite, but never forget yourself with them.” It's not a fair warning, but it'll do for now. If Dáin and the rest show Fíli the respect his station deserves, he'll never need to know just how many doubt him. “You are the crown prince, act like it.”

Dáin and his party are already gathered in the receiving room, not the grand throne room where formal business is conducted. Dáin is both family and a friend of Erebor, so he is admitted to the room Thorin takes council in, an honour not many are given in these days. Thorin may be a good king to his people, but he's been less than forgiving to the nobles who were a little too quick to turn their backs on him when he was poor and in need. Dáin is one of the few, so Bilbo dearly hopes they can build a stronger friendship with him, and perhaps even win some of his favour, if not Fíli himself, then for Thorin's trust that the young prince will be worthy of the crown.

The party is still standing, thankfully, so they are at least willing to pay lip service, and Dáin smiles wide when he sees them. He's a handsome Dwarf, looking a bit like Thorin in the sense of shared family features, but not enough so anyone that didn't know could spot the resemblance. He favours more rings and beads in his hair and beard, and likes a bit more finery in his clothing. Thorin's gotten too used to the simpler things in his time in exile, Bilbo thinks, and will perhaps never be comfortable in the prettier things he can now have.

“Your Highness,” Dáin addresses him first, a polite nod to his place by Thorin's side. “And your Highness.” He grins a bit cheekily at the repeat as he nods to Fíli as well, putting a friendly hand on the boy's shoulder. “You both look well. I understand Thorin has been delayed?”

“He sends his apologies,” Bilbo says, even though Thorin said no such thing, nor would have, as he walks with both Fíli and Dáin to the less ornate throne that sits at the head of the table, on a raised dais. Fíli sits when Balin raises his eyebrows at him significantly, and Bilbo curses himself for not reminding him that he would be expected to sit in his uncle's place. Hopefully none of Dáin's party noticed the pause. Their complaints are all centred around Fíli not knowing the first thing about being a proper noble, and he must not let them see they're probably right.

He takes his place in the chair at Fíli's right, Balin taking the left, choosing to remain standing. It's only after Fíli has sat that Dáin, and his council, follow suit. It raises Bilbo's hopes. He has no idea just what Dáin's actual aspirations are, if he truly desires to usurp Fíli, or if it's just his own lot talking nonsense.

“Her Highness, Princess Dís, is not joining us?” Dáin asks, looking about as though she might still come in.

“No, I'm afraid her Highness cannot be present. She's down in the Guild Halls again, overseeing the negotiating of the redistricting of the city.” While the rebuilding is going along

as best as can be expected, the usable parts of the cities are still much smaller than they had been, and each guild seems to think they need the most space. There have been one too many brawls for anyone's liking, so now Dís, her hand steadily on her sword, manages them. The Princess is much like her brother, order kept with either a verbal warning, or a steel one.

Bilbo's just grateful it's not him.

"A shame, I had looked forward to seeing her again," Dáin says, but he's still smiling, so he's not too disappointed. Bilbo makes a note to send word to her, down in the city, to see if she can spare some time for the lord. She's likely to send back a firm no, but he can at least try. "When is Thorin to join us then?"

"By nightfall, he hopes," Fíli answers, smiling. "Until then, we'll have to make due with one another." It's said jovially enough, but there's an air of authority that makes Bilbo proud. He can be a prince when he puts his mind to it, Bilbo knows it, especially when Kíli is not around to encourage him into mischief. "I understand you wish to place more soldiers here, when you already have so many?" He asks this so politely, but with that edge that reminds Bilbo of Thorin.

"Perhaps this matter is best left until your uncle arrives," one advisor says, only the tiniest bit condescending. Bilbo struggles for his name for a moment before recalling it is Wrain. "Only, he understands military matters a bit better, your Highness."

"That's true," Fíli replies, nodding. "However, I at least understand that soldiers need barracks to sleep in and food to eat. We are already at our limits, Lord Wrain." Beside him, Balin doesn't contradict, and neither does Bilbo, even when Dáin looks between them all, questioning a little, the smile still tugging at the corners of his mouth. "We can take no more, no matter what your generals think they require."

They're not quite so stretched as that, but it's not a complete lie. The fact of the matter is, Thorin wants to save the barracks for his own building forces, using Dáin's troops as examples for training, to get them into shape faster. Once that's done, his plan is to slowly send them all home to Dáin again, before they can establish families and residences.

"And is that what your uncle has decided?" Lord Wrain asks, an insult, albeit a subtle one.

"I admit, my hearing has not been the same since the Battle," Fíli says, showing his damaged left ear with an open smile. It's more cosmetic than anything else, but the hearing on that side is impaired. It makes several of them chuckle, as Fíli says, "But Uncle shouts at me loud enough I could hear him if I'd lost both ears." It's self-deprecating, and Fíli's charm helps as he grins at them all. "We can take no more here in Erebor, Lord Thrain. That is not negotiable. Perhaps we can find another way to bring all our people home though, if we think on it."

Balin barely hides his proud smile behind his beard, and Bilbo doesn't try.

By the time they're done with their first talks, about perhaps allowing some of their own guild members in, to help those already in Erebor to rebuild, or even begin some more construction, things look well. The break for supper, and Bilbo escorts Dáin to his quarters

himself. As a cousin, he's allowed a guest room in the family apartments, so it wouldn't be proper for a non-family member to escort him, and Fíli's done so well, Bilbo's let him run back to his brother early.

"You look well, Master Baggins," Dáin says, once they're alone and no longer have to stand on formalities. "Erebor suits you."

"I suppose," Bilbo agrees, knowing better than to show any unhappiness. Dáin is friendly, but he's not a friend, not just yet, so all must always appear well in the House of Durin to him. "I've been gardening, so I've gotten my colour back."

"Gardening?" Dáin questions, brow furrowed. "You are a queer little thing, aren't you, Master Baggins? But I suppose that fits. Thorin always liked odd things."

Bilbo's not sure if it's meant as a jab or not. It sounds like a friendly enough statement, but it could be an attempt at finding out if Bilbo is receptive to Thorin being criticized. In any case, he raises his eyebrows, and keeps his hands clasped behind his back. "Did he? Then yes, I suppose it fits." The lie, again, that Bilbo is Thorin's One. Cursed Dwarrows and their need to be so very dramatic about everything, them and Elves both. A Hobbit simply gets married to who they like, and it's all so much easier. "These will be your rooms," Bilbo opens the door to the chambers, admitting Dáin first.

"These are not the same as last time," Dáin comments, looking around. "I'd say this one was finally cleaned out. I can see where the supports were reinforced recently. It's good work."

Bilbo fights the urge to roll his eyes, as Dáin inspects it closely, paying no attention to the fine furnishings. Show a Dwarf a rose garden in full bloom and they're more interested in the gravel path. "I'm glad you approve. Thorin will be happy to hear it." Likely he wouldn't care, and Dáin knew it, but instead of a polite agreement, he smirks.

"Thorin won't give a rat's arse whether I like the rooms," he replies, catching Bilbo off guard. "I hope he's grateful, to have you here to cover up his shortcomings."

Bilbo's not sure what to say, and it must show, because Dáin says, "I fear I've overstepped my bounds. My apologies."

"It's fine," Bilbo says, smiling, relieved to at least have something worth saying now. "Thorin's more concerned with whether we can house the families and open the markets than he is with any of this, as I'm sure you can guess. He does like for his guests to be comfortable though." That much is true, even if he doesn't care if they particularly like where they are.

"That I can believe." When he sees Bilbo is close to the door, he nods. "I'll say my good-nights then. Thorin should be back soon, and you'll be eager to see him, I imagine."

"I am, yes," he replies. "Good night then, and sleep well."

Once the door is shut, he goes to his own rooms, and he's not too surprised to find them already occupied. Thorin is reclining in the armchair by the fire, his pipe already lit, and armour gone, showing he'd been to his own rooms first.

Bilbo looks him over, anxious that Thorin had stretched the truth in his note. He's done it before, claimed to be unharmed, and come back in no such state, but at least this time he appears hale and whole. "None dead?" he asks, after checking the door is securely shut.

"No." Thorin shakes his head, pipe balanced in his fingers. He's wearing no rings, and his clothing is much simpler than any of Dáin's party; still good quality, the best that could be got, but plain, with no unnecessary adornments. Not that Thorin really needs any, to look like a king. He is always a king, and he always appears as one, at least to Bilbo. "No, we all live, even the Elves."

"Try not to sound so disappointed," Bilbo replies dryly.

"I make no promises." Thorin exhales smoke, as the fire crackles. "Balin seemed pleased with Fili. He truly did well?"

"He did." Bilbo sits in his own chair, not quite ready for his own pipe. "He handled it all quite well, but I think he'll be thrilled to have you back on the throne tomorrow. He's still a bit overwhelmed by it all, not that I blame him."

Thorin chuckles, and they sit in silence for a time. Sometimes, Thorin just likes to sit with him, enjoying his company. Bilbo suspects it's because he is one of the few who doesn't expect the world of Thorin, and if he can be nothing else to Thorin, he'll take being comfort.

"I brought you something." Thorin tilts his head towards the table by the doors, where a wrapped bundle sits. When Bilbo undoes the string and folds the fabric back, he finds a new set of gardening tools, and though he really does roll his eyes at Thorin and his ridiculous ways, they're clearly better make and quality than the first set. He's put his mark in too, at the top of them all, and if Bilbo rubs his thumb over it with a fond smile, his back is to Thorin anyway.

"Where did you find the time?" he asks, admiring the heft of the trowel. They're all made to last longer than Bilbo, he'll wager.

"Never mind that." Thorin says, looking a bit annoyed. "Do they please you?"

"Of course." Bilbo puts them all back, so they won't topple off in the night, and goes back over to Thorin and the fire. "Thank you, Thorin, though you really didn't have to go through the trouble."

Thorin takes his hand, the one with the ring, his wide palm easily encircling Bilbo's, and caresses the sapphire set in it, a distant look in his eyes. The fire is hot at Bilbo's back, but it's no excuse for the heat in his face. Thorin rarely touches him, and when he does, it never fails to make Bilbo's heart race. "I am your husband," he says, like he's reminding Bilbo of the fact, as though he could possibly forget that he somehow ended up married to a king. This king. His king.

"Yes, and you are also running a kingdom, not a forge," Bilbo says, for something to say instead of what he wants to. "Try to remember."

“Ah,” Thorin raises his eyebrows, expression still soft and slowly crushing Bilbo's good sense, as he holds Bilbo's hand still. “And you are Consort to the King, not a gardener. Try to remember.” The hand turns his own over, so Thorin can see his palm, rubbed red from the gardening tools, and the raw space in the crux of his thumb and forefinger. With care, he touches there as well, eyes on it. “A Consort with calluses on his hands, but not from battle. I do not believe I have ever seen such a thing.”

Bilbo swallows. “The beds out there are a battle, only a different sort than you're used to. And I've never been much good at swinging a sword, you'll recall, so let me have my victories where I can.”

“Good enough to save a king's life.” Thorin contradicts, his thumb now on the sensitive skin inside Bilbo's wrist. “I think I will like the spoils of your war, in any case. I've missed tomatoes.” He smiles, happy, “I do not believe I have ever seen such a thing as you, Bilbo, and never could I have asked for a more loyal spouse. What have I done to deserve such a Consort?”

For a moment, the words Bilbo has longed to say for so long gather up on his tongue, as Thorin holds Bilbo's wrist in his big hand, but then there's a knock at the door, and he pulls away to answer, thankful for the chance to breathe. It's only the maid, with his tea, and she's thoughtfully added a second cup. He takes it in himself, and shuts the door again with his foot.

Thorin takes the cup he pours for him, eyes back on the fire and not Bilbo. He curls into his own, legs tucked up quite improperly, hands closed around the cup, not that he needs the warmth. The fire is good for it, at least here. One of the servants will have lit the one in his room and slid the warming pans beneath the sheets as well, the covers turned down and waiting.

“Excuse me, for a moment,” he says, though Thorin doesn't seem to hear. His bedroom is indeed quite inviting, but Thorin is still here, and it's not as though he can just invite him in as well. Instead, he changed into his nightshirt and dressing gown, and re-joins Thorin.

The change of clothes at least gets his attention. “Am I keeping you up?”

“No,” Bilbo lies, sitting back down and taking a sip of his tea. “I thought I'd read for a bit anyway.”

“What are you reading now?” Thorin peers over at the book in Bilbo's lap, but it's already open so he can't see the cover himself.

“Another epic, as your people are so fond of writing.” He taps the one he's open to. “I was recommended it, for my own studies.” It's just a translation, of course, but he thinks as long as he knows the stories, it'll be good enough for Dáin's people. He won't let them ruin all Thorin's built, not after all he's been through for it. Not after he very nearly died for it. No, Dáin's lot hasn't earned Erebor. Thorin and Fíli and Kíli have. This is their birth right, and Bilbo will fight for them to keep it. “The Ballad of Ástknút and Furageir,” he says fondly. He's read it through twice now already, and while he should move on to other tales, he's a little in love with this one. “Do you know it? 'Under the mountain deep, the forge burned-’”

Thorin chuckles. "It's not meant to be recited, Halfling. It's a ballad, it's to be sung."

Bilbo supposes that makes sense. "In your own tongue, I assume?"

"In yours too." Thorin says, taking a last puff of the pipe before he finishes it, and rests it in the stand on the table beside him. Bilbo wants to ask, so very much, but before he can, Thorin begins, in the common tongue, his voice deep and steady, a little rough from smoke. If anything, it gives the tale an edge it's never had in his mind.

He sets his tea aside, and closes his eyes, listening, his mind painting traitorous images he allows with a heavy heart, as Thorin sings of love and lovers. His head grows heavy, and he scolds himself, tries to force himself up and into bed, but it's all so nice, the fire and the chair and Thorin, the scent of pipe smoke still in the air.

He wakes a bit, when he feels the arms slide under his knees and back. "I'm not a child," he mumbles, into Thorin's shoulder. His husband smells good, like smoke and soap and himself. Bilbo's stomach curls with heat, even mostly asleep, as Thorin carries him to bed.

He opens his eyes when Thorin brings the covers up over him, and for just a second, the question lingers on the tip of his tongue, the invitation to join him. For only a moment.

And then he slips back under the wave of sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Criticism is welcome, as always.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Dáin is up to something, Fíli is causing trouble, and Bilbo's got some new rosebushes.

Chapter Notes

A/N A day of nothing but chai + Easter candy = intense fucking acid reflux.

Just, you know. Telling you. So you don't do it too.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He's humming the ballad still, a few days later, as he tends his brand new roses. They'd shown up with their roots wrapped in burlap, waiting on his terrace without a note, their buds showing them to be red and yellow and white. He's sure he can breed a pink from the red and white, and some pretty striped ones too, if he's careful.

He's not sure if they're Thorin's way thanking him for taking care of the initial meeting with Dáin, or apologizing in advance for something. Possibly both. Either way, they're going to be beautiful come the summer, and with a few years care they'll be as good as his ones back in Bag End were.

Knowing Lobelia, they're no longer as lovely. It makes his heart clench a bit, to think of his mother's home ruined by that woman, even if he lives in a royal house now. He misses his childhood home so much it aches, sometimes, but even he knows there's little point in it anymore. He gave up Bag End for good the morning he'd spoken those old vows to Thorin, wounded and perhaps dying in his tent, on a battlefield reeking of death.

Sacrificed his home for his heart, and somehow, he doesn't think Belladonna Baggins would have faulted him.

“That's a heavy tale for such a small creature.”

Bilbo almost falls, turning to look around for the voice.

Dáin Ironfoot is standing on his terrace, smiling like he has every right to be on it. “You really are a queer little thing, Master Baggins.” He leans over to survey Bilbo's drawing, laid out on the bench. “Are you planting vegetables, even? A King's Consort, growing tomatoes, acting like a common gardener.” He chuckles to himself and makes his way over to Bilbo.

“And I've heard you called a burglar as well, by the King's Company. What other titles do you have?”

“That would be telling.” Bilbo deflects, standing up and removing his gloves. Dáin reaches down and grabs the spade he was using, turning it over in his hand until he finds Thorin's mark. He seems a bit surprised, but Bilbo's not sure. “Are you interested in gardening now too?”

Dáin shrugs. “Admiring the workmanship. A king who was a smith. Perhaps you and Thorin are well-suited to one another.”

Now Bilbo's just insulted on Thorin's behalf, and it's not often he has to feel that way. Thorin's never bothered by much of anything most of his lot regard as insults, just raising a brow, or going quiet. But this is a sore point, and Bilbo won't stand to hear it in Thorin's own home. “Queer for a king to use his skills to feed his family and people?” Thorin might have been brought low by his exile, but he'd never been ashamed of what he'd done to feed his nephews and the rest, and Bilbo won't let anyone else make it sound like he should be. “I wonder what you would do, if a dragon chose to nest in your mountains.”

Dáin's only thrown for a second. He recovers quickly, his smile growing bigger. “I see I've overstepped. Pray forgive me, your Highness, I meant no harm by it. Indeed, most kings would never do what Thorin did. They would waste away and let their own starve before lowering themselves in such a way. But Thorin has never loved by halves. He would die for his people, and be a smith for them as well.” He shrugs, good-natured, or at least wanting to seem so. “It's probably what makes them love him so much. I can admit to some jealousy, there.”

Bilbo starts to gather his things together, putting his gloves and tools away in their basket. “You would let your people starve while you clung to propriety?” he asks, annoyed by the lord. He shouldn't be on Bilbo's terrace without invitation. Even the boys knock, though Bilbo's lucky if they wait for permission before tumbling in.

“No, I wouldn't, but I've never had the talent Thorin did for metalwork. They would starve anyway.” He's after something, Bilbo suspects. He's got that look in his eyes, the same one Lobelia got every time she came around for tea and the good silver was used. “He really does beautiful work.” He's eyeing Bilbo's ring now, as he slips it back on. “I've always admired his skill. The ring must have taken him ages.”

Bilbo adjusts it, the pads of his fingers brushing over the delicate-looking design, and the smooth sapphire. It had been Thorin's own, before it was his, Thorin merely resizing the band for him. It's really too big for a Hobbit finger, but it's all they'd had at the time to work with. “I honestly couldn't say. It was his for years before we married. It was all he could gift me with, after the battle.” It sounds terribly romantic, even to him, and he knows the truth. Thorin taking a ring from his own finger to marry his love with. It's the stuff of legends.

“I admit,” Dáin says, and he's a little too close for propriety. “That is a good story. But I know my cousin.” He's still smiling, but that look in his eye, it tells Bilbo a number of things about just what Dáin knows. “And he doesn't have a sentimental bone in his body.”

“You and Thorin didn't see each other for years,” Bilbo reminds him, struggling to get the conversation back under his control. It's already too late, he suspects, but he has to try.

“No, but time doesn't change a person's fundamental nature.” He has the nerve to take Bilbo's hand and inspect the ring a bit closer. “It's a good story. Probably Lord Balin's doing, if I had to guess. And then I'd say Master Nori made sure everyone knew said story?”

It's slanderous and entirely true and Bilbo has no idea just how many have heard Dáin and what he knows, or what Dáin is intending to use this information for. His own gain, somehow, most likely.

Bilbo can't let himself panic. It doesn't matter what Dáin thinks, it matters what Dáin can prove. Their marriage looks good, and the story is good, and the Company is loyal to the bone to the both of them. They will stand by their word that Thorin and Bilbo became lovers over the long journey, that Bilbo is Thorin's fabled One, and that their union is rooted in mutual love. Dáin can spin whatever tales he likes, but Thorin can silence him, if necessary.

And so can Bilbo.

“Are you calling my husband a liar?” he asks, conversationally, when what he's really doing is warning Dáin that he's committing treason if he keeps on this way. Bilbo can't do much to Dáin, not without it looking like a savvy play to remove Dáin from the succession and assure his own favourite of the crown. Fíli's right will always be questioned then. But he can put the fear of it in Dáin.

Only Dáin is still smiling, as he leaves Bilbo's side to stroll around the centre bed, seemingly admiring Bilbo's work. “No, I'm not quite that much of an idiot, Master Baggins. Nor am I cruel. I'm sure Thorin had a reason, a very good one, for choosing you as his husband over one of the Men or my own people. And really, after watching you handle Fíli, and hearing how you handle your own duties and his Majesty's, I must admit he chose the best option.”

He sounds genuine, but Bilbo can't be sure, and it must show on his face, because Dáin keeps going. “You've heard the rumours from my own, I'm assuming. About me being Thorin's heir.” He kneels, and investigates the earth a bit closer, running a hand over the tops of the soft green poking through. “I have my own mountain I am lord of, Master Baggins, and it's enough of a headache. My blessings to Fíli, and more to his Majesty, you, and Lady Dís for your efforts to turn him into a good king. I suspect you will need them.”

Bilbo chuckles, despite himself, because the thought of Fíli on the throne still sometimes caused him a bit of panic, not helped by the boy at all, most days. “I'm just thankful Fíli is the heir,” he confides, and Dáin laughs too, long and loud.

“Oh Mahal, King Kíli. If he were the heir, I might try to angle myself in just out of mercy for Erebor.” He stands, his leathers creaking as he does. “Fíli will be a good king, given enough time, and thankfully he has it. Thorin is too stubborn to die anytime soon, if I know him.”

“If you're not interested in being his heir, why are you trying to place more troops in Erebor?” Bilbo asks, curious.

“Because I have five generals, and three are displaced from Erebor. They want to come home, and share in its riches, and they wield no small amount of influence over my court. They want me named Thorin's heir because it means they can come home for good, whereas if Thorin, and Fili, in time, stay in power, they cannot. Thorin does not forgive, nor does he forget. He's very much a son of Durin's line, in that respect.” Dáin walks further out, to look at the bed by the low wall. “He will never trust them again. They abandoned him, when all seemed lost, or that's how he sees it. They only wanted to feed their families and their soldiers. I see his view too though, and I will not fault him for it.”

“They left Thorin and his family to fend for themselves, when they had sworn fealty to him.” Bilbo says, though he knows Dáin doesn't need to be reminded of that. “No, he will never trust them again in Erebor. He will never believe that they have the best interests of the people of Erebor in mind.” He sighs. “But you put them in charge of your armies?”

Dáin has the good grace to look embarrassed. “They came to me seeking help, Master Baggins. I could not turn them, or their soldiers, away. You might fault me for that, but I did what I thought was best then.”

“You left your cousin to be a wandering smith, his people, the ones who stayed loyal, to live in Ered Luin, where they would have died out.” He's heard enough to know Ered Luin couldn't support the whole of Erebor, that there wasn't nearly enough metal in the mountain range, nor safe places to carve out houses. It was a desperate bid for a home, not a solution. “I can fault you for that.”

“And in that, I will not blame you. I was afraid for my own position, and I let my cousin and his people fend for themselves. I was wrong, and I know it. Believe me, I know it.” He clasps his hands behind his back, and smiles, but there is no joy in it. “I will not rise against Thorin. If anything, the army I lent him was what I owed to him, a debt I had been sorely remiss on.”

Bilbo nods. “My husband would agree.” He doesn't emphasize 'my husband'. He doesn't need to. Dáin is smart enough to understand. “If you don't agree with your council, or your generals, why are you here?”

Dain shrugs. “To seem like I'm appeasing them, mainly. I want them to feel I did my best, so they remain loyal to me, while keeping Thorin as happy as he ever is.” His armour, so much prettier than Thorin's, catches the sunlight and Bilbo's eye. It's not a soldier's armour, but a lord's. Bilbo, who could once tell no difference between the two, now finds he has no respect for Dáin's, for all that he led an army to Thorin's side. “I like my mountain, Master Baggins. It's a good one.”

“I'm sure it is.” He wonders if Dáin rides into battle a soldier, or if he stays behind a guard. If he fights like Thorin, like a true warrior, his sword held not high, but to his side, ready to slice through enemies. “Thorin won't yield. You have to know that.”

“I do.” He's circled the centre bed completely, and come back to stand beside Bilbo. “Burglar, gardener, King's Consort. Such a small creature, how do you stand under the weight of all that honour?”

Bilbo raises his eyebrows. “Sometimes I use a walking stick, if I'm feeling a bit poorly.”

Dáin laughs, and claps a hand on Bilbo's shoulder. "I do like you, Master Baggins." He's entirely too close for Bilbo's comfort, as close as one of the Company would come. He's come to understand this is just how things are, among the Dwarrows, but there's something a bit improper in Dáin doing it, even by Dwarf custom. "I truly do."

"I am glad to hear you approve of my choice in husband."

Thorin's entry onto the terrace makes Dáin withdraw, thankfully, and Bilbo's happier to have Thorin come into his personal space, between him and Dáin. He smiles at Thorin, despite his previous discomfort. "And how are you this day, my Halfling?" Thorin asks. He doesn't usually address Bilbo in such a way in company. It's possessive.

"I'm fine. Mistress Tern was right, I needed more straw on the far bed to keep the soil warm until the hedges get themselves settled. They're putting out new leaves already." He doubts Thorin cares, but it makes him happy when Thorin at least pretends to show interest in his plants. "What have you been up to?"

"Overseeing the boys' lessons," he answers, angling himself further between Dáin and Bilbo. Ridiculous. "Kíli is..."

"Being Kíli?" Bilbo suggests helpfully.

"Yes." Thorin sounds displeased with life in general. "Dáin, pray, forgive me, but there are some private matters my husband and I must discuss." Again with the *my*. "I will join you at breakfast, tomorrow morning."

Dáin's smile has faded into something a bit less amiable, but he nods. "Of course, Thorin. Master Baggins, I hope you will consider joining us as well."

"We'll see," Bilbo replies politely, even though he has no intention of it. Once Dáin is gone, he turns back to Thorin with a raised brow. "Who broke what?"

Thorin's expression has hardened without Dáin around to impress, and he shakes his head, pinching the bridge of his nose. "I'll murder the both of them, and then there will be no argument over my heir."

When Bilbo pats his arm consolingly, Thorin snatches up his hand, rubbing his thumb over the stone on the ring. "Thorin, if you kill them Dís will murder you," he reminds him. "And then who will be king?"

"It can all be Dáin's problem," Thorin mutters darkly. "I'll just kill Fíli. Dain can inherit Kíli. And Dís."

"And me as well?" Bilbo jokes, but Thorin doesn't laugh. "I wasn't serious, you know, so don't get any ideas about entombing me with you just to be contrary."

Thorin looks down at him, Bilbo's hand still caught in his, warm around his fingers. "What? Is that something Hobbits do?"

Bilbo huffs. “It’s from an old story, from the East. A great king passed, and had all of his wives and husbands entombed with him, so he would not be alone.”

His particular king wrinkles his nose. “What an odd practice.” The hand-holding is getting uncomfortable, Bilbo’s face warming at the attention. “To take more than one spouse. Do Hobbits do that?”

“Only if the first one dies, or if there’s a divorce.” Bilbo is torn between drawing away, or just letting Thorin continue with his fascination of his old ring, the one he’d given Bilbo. “You don’t have divorce, I suppose.”

“We do, but it’s rare. Only done in cases where there is no other solution. Abuse. Unfaithfulness, which is an abuse, in our laws.” He finally releases Bilbo’s hand, but instead of moving away from him, he stays in Bilbo’s space, very close, so close Bilbo can smell that Thorin had washed his hair the night previous, and oiled his leathers recently. He wonders what Thorin’s hair looks like unbraided and tangled across a pillow, wonders what it would feel like on his skin.

Emboldened by some strange force, he dares to run his fingers through a lock that hangs over Thorin’s shoulder, under the premise of untangling it. He’s felt Thorin’s hair before, and it’s that same curious coarse-softness that he remembers. The sensation on his fingertips is of course not what it would be across his shoulders, but it’s enough to satisfy him for now.

He wonders again what it would be like to kiss Thorin like a true husband would now, the scratch of his beard and moustache against his mouth.

A silly thought, and he shakes it off, smiling pleasantly at Thorin as he watches Bilbo fuss over his hair. “Why was Dáin here, in your rooms?” Thorin asks, in a low voice. “You do not usually take strangers in here.”

“He invited himself in.” Bilbo says, still annoyed by the presumption. “It’s not important. Why are you so upset with Fíli and Kíli?”

“Why am I usually upset with them?” Thorin asks, sarcastic as he removes his gauntlets. “Fíli is acting like he has no duties or responsibilities beyond his own wants.” He sighs, and stretches his freed fingers. “I’ve explained to him already why he can no longer put himself first, but he still just doesn’t understand. Or won’t.”

“I’ve told you already, Fíli is still so young. He needs time.” Thorin puts his gauntlets down on the bench, followed by his coat. He always seems smaller without it, but he is still much broader than Bilbo. “And it’s hard on him to act like an adult when you and Dís insist on treating him like a child in certain ways.”

Thorin raises his eyebrows. “If he did not insist on behaving like one—”

“He wouldn’t, if you gave him the respect he wants from you,” Bilbo argues, not harshly. “For what it’s worth, Dáin says he’s pleased with his own mountain. His generals, on the other hand,”

His king nods. “That's what I suspected. Dáin's never been particularly ambitious. I thought it was possible time had changed that, but he's been as amiable as ever since he arrived.” Bilbo follows along, kneeling to get a little loose soil off a young sprout. “Do you like him?”

“Who? Dáin?” He supposes he likes Dáin all right, but he finds him pushy. He reminds Bilbo of a cousin of his on his mother's side, Helleborus. Not so rude he could say anything without sounding like he was whining, but enough to give him an uneasy feeling at times. Still, he's Thorin's cousin, and he gets the idea that they were close when they were young. He doesn't want to be rude. “Dáin is amiable, like you said. His company is enjoyable.” *In small doses*, he finishes silently, so it's not a lie. Lying to one's spouse is also rude, after all.

“He's always been more personable.” Thorin sounds almost disappointed. “He's like Fíli and Kíli. He makes friends easily.”

Bilbo stands again, confused, unsure of what he's said wrong in this conversation. “The friends you work to earn are often the most valuable,” he says, something his mother had told him when he was a boy. “Easily won love and loyalty are easily lost.”

It cheers Thorin somewhat, and before Bilbo's quite figured out what he's doing, he's brushed a chaste kiss across his brow. His heart jumps to his throat as he wishes hard that Thorin had ducked down and kissed him properly instead. He doesn't though, his kiss no different than what a child would get. He remembers Thorin carrying him to bed, not for the first time, and worries that with the vast differences between their ages, it's impossible for Thorin to ever feel any desire whatsoever towards him.

His own dejection must show, because Thorin withdraws, his face closed-off from him. “Forgive me,” he says. “I forget Hobbits are not like us.”

“No, we're not,” Bilbo agrees, looking away and longing for his pipe. Why must he always make things awkward between them by letting his affection show? “I will get used to it eventually.”

Thorin spies the tools laid out, and picks the little rake up. “You like them?”

He's grateful for the change of subject. “Yes. They're much better than the ones I bought in town. Dáin admired them too.” Bilbo's trying to pay him a compliment, but instead, Thorin's grip tightens around the handle.

“Dáin touched them?” he asks, again in that low, even tone of voice that tells Bilbo just how close he is to losing his temper.

“Yes?” he hazards. “I'm sorry, have I missed something?”

Thorin shakes his head and puts it down. “No. It's nothing.” It's clearly not, but he doesn't want to have a row with Thorin over something stupid, so he wisely drops it. “Kíli must be present tomorrow, for the Council, with his brother. I would ask you as well, to make sure he's on his best behaviour, and to soften any insult I might unintentionally give. And the ones I intentionally give.”

Bilbo smiles at him, and looks to the roses. "So that's what those are an apology for."

"I thought they might suit," he answers. "I know you dislike it, but you're more talented in that area." His king smirks. "A diplomat, as well as everything else. Hobbits are very exceptional little creatures, aren't they?"

Bilbo goes to pack his pipe, and shrugs as he opens the tine he keeps his pipeweed in, a pretty little thing that had shown up in his rooms months ago. He suspects Thorin, but something so innocuous could easily have been the boys trying to make up with him. "Hobbits have large families, Thorin. You learn which aunt likes black tea and which uncle needs his pipeweed first and who isn't speaking to whom and who took whose mother's ring before she was cold in the ground all before you learn to button your waistcoat." He lights his pipe and takes a puff, re-joining Thorin in the lovely warm afternoon light. "So we are born to be diplomats, I suppose." He offers the pipe to Thorin, and his husband takes it, his eyes closing in pleasure at the first hit of it. "You do not have children like we do though."

"No. Fewer women, for one, and less inclination. We're more interested in our craft, in any case, whatever it may be that calls to a Dwarf." Thorin passes the pipe back, and follows Bilbo to sit on his bench, pushing his coat aside. "We have close ties to kin and friends. We may take lovers as we wish. That's also why marriage and children aren't as common. And there are the stories we're told as children, about our One. We all would rather wait until we find them before we're married."

"So you never found your One? Or do not all of you have one?" Bilbo asks, taking a few good puffs on the pipe before passing it back. Thorin rolls the base in his fingers, then bites the end, but does not answer. "Thorin?"

"I cannot answer your question one way or the other, Bilbo. It does not matter anyway. You are my husband, and that is how it will stay." He's uncertain though, as he stares ahead. "If that is what you want, of course."

"You'll do, for now," he replies, just a bit cheeky, and his husband chuckles.

Bilbo settles back, as a cold breeze blows. He's losing the light, but he's done enough for the day, he guesses, and he had better head in soon anyway. If he's going to sit on the Council tomorrow, he needs a bath tonight, and an outfit laid out for the morning. He'll need to look at his law book again too, and maybe a quick scan of the old etiquette book, just so he'll be sure to keep everyone polite.

He can sit out here and enjoy Thorin's company and his garden for now though.

The wind picks up though, and he's decidedly uncomfortable. "Would you mind us moving inside, Thorin?"

"Are you cold?" Again, he throws his big coat around Bilbo's shoulders. "I could have a pit for a fire dug for you. Or perhaps they can direct heat from the furnace out here. A system of some kind, like the hot houses use." He's already building in his mind, and Bilbo is content to let him. It's colder here on the mountain than it ever was back in the Shire, and he pulls his legs under the coat as well.

“Don’t glass it in, whatever you plan. I need somewhere with fresh air and sunshine,” he says, just to be sure Thorin doesn’t get carried away.

“I could expand it though, build you a hot house, so that you might have your greenery all year.” He sounds so hopeful, and it does sound nice, if not excessive. Bilbo hasn’t thought of the winter yet, honestly, looking forward to the summer for now. “That would please you?”

“You’re awfully interested in pleasing me, Thorin,” Bilbo teases, from inside the warm cocoon of Thorin’s coat. He refuses to think of how Thorin could really please him, but it’s hard when he can smell Thorin on the coat, and Thorin is so close. He loves his rooms, loves what Thorin has done for him, but he can admit to being lonely at night in the bed, wishing his marriage was not such a cold one.

“You are my husband,” Thorin says, as though that is explanation enough. For Thorin, it is, he supposes. “And you do much for me. I will do what I can to repay you in kind.”

Bilbo sighs. “Thorin, I do what I do because...” He falters for the right word, any word but the first one to come to mind. “For the same reason I married you, I suppose. You are my greatest friend. I would do anything for you.” This at least is mostly the truth, but not the whole of it.

Thorin is quiet, satisfied with this answer, and they pass the pipe back and forth between them until it is smoked down and they’re both as easy as they can ever be. Once the sun sets, they move inside, and Thorin takes the silent invitation to stay when Bilbo requests tea for two be brought up to them.

The fire is warm, and the chair is soft, and he has his books to read while Thorin stares off into the fire. At first, Bilbo had not understood how Thorin could sit without occupation, but over time, he’s learned Thorin likes the time to think over everything that has been done that day and its future implications, or plan ahead. Once he’s mulled it all over, he’ll speak to Bilbo about it and ask his advice on it, even if he’s already made up his mind.

This night is no exception. Bilbo’s hair is still damp on his neck from his bath as he flips through the etiquette book, a quill and a piece of paper in hand as he scribbles down a crib sheet for Kíli and him to go over on the morrow, when Thorin finally speaks on what it is bothering him this night with his heir.

“Fíli has apparently been spending much time in the Library lately,” he says, rubbing his chin as he speaks. “Dís says he’s hiding something from her and Kíli too.”

Bilbo looks up from his writing, and closes it away. It’s enough to get Kíli through tomorrow, and this subject is arguably more important. Anything that’s distracting Fíli from his duties is a problem. “What would he have made for him, though? Fíli is no great smith, not like you and Kíli.”

“The ‘Rí family are weavers and scribes by trade. If he’s serious, it’ll be no bauble. He’ll gift the house with fine wool, silks, or some such. Or paper and ink. Something to show Dori he can provide, not that he needs to do it, really. It’s traditional though.” The grey in Thorin’s hair is silver in the firelight, with the lamps unlit.

Sometimes, when Bilbo looks at him, his chest hurts, squeezes like it's in a vice. Now, his profile in the light, with his hair wild about his face, is one of those times.

He gets himself together, and thinks on the problem. "He refused him once already," he points out.

"His plan, if I know Fíli, is to bully him into it, though he won't see it that way. He'll see it all as very romantic, like one of those ballads, and not think for a second he's putting him in a position he doesn't want to be in," Thorin says. "He should not have led Fíli on, in Ered Luin, but he did. Let him think it would come to something."

Bilbo stands to pour them both another cup of tea, and when he gives Thorin his, he comes to Ori's defence. "I do not think he meant to lead Fíli on. He loved him, loves him still. Or rather, he loves Fíli, the musician. He does not love Fíli, Crown Prince of Erebor, quite so much." He sits back down with his own cup, careful not to spill. "No, not even that. King's Consort, that, he does not love."

"Then he should not have loved Fíli the musician," Thorin says forcefully.

"Do you really think it was Ori who pursued Fíli?" Bilbo asks pointedly, and sees Thorin slump in the chair. "Whatever pain Fíli is in he brought on himself. He knew his position, and he knows how Ori is. He had to realize Ori would never consent to a marriage with him, not with everything it entails." He swirls his tea, watching the tea leaves that made it past the strainer float and settle down at the bottom of the cup. "If we could, it'd be smart to marry him to one of Dáin's lot. To Dáin, even, if we could."

"It would be. And Kíli to someone from Dale, you think?"

"If you could convince him." Bilbo agrees. "Or rather Dís. You know they'll do as she says."

Thorin studies his tea, and sighs. "Except Kíli tells me Fíli thinks Ori is his One. He felt he was wrong to break his brother's confidence, but I think he would have felt worse had he kept it from me, like Fíli intended to."

Bilbo considers that. "Could he be mistaken?"

"No," Thorin is very firm. "No, he could not be. It's not something you can mistake." The way he says it is so final, it tells Bilbo what he only thought he wanted to know. Now that he knows for sure that Thorin does, or did, have a One, he feels like crawling into his bed and hiding beneath the covers for the rest of forever. Married to and in love with someone who would never love him back, what a torturous existence ahead of him. "I need you to help me put him off. He'll believe you have his best interests at heart, at least. Just get him to leave Ori be until we sort this mess with Dáin out, and then perhaps Ori could be swayed."

Bilbo nods. "Right then. Dain, his advisors, Kíli's manners, and Fíli and his nonsense. Is that the right order?"

Thorin smiles, and places his cup on the table beside him. "Sleep should be the first one, my Halfling."

At this, Bilbo blinks heavily, and realizes he's slumped against the chair. Yawning, he puts his cup down, and rubs his eyes with the heels of his hands. "No wonder all those kings in stories died young and victorious in battle. The actual job is just horrid."

"It is, isn't it?" Thorin says with a nod, as Bilbo closes his eyes to rest for a moment. "You're exhausted."

"You're just as." Bilbo accuses, and then feels himself pulled up. "I suppose I should be grateful you're not carrying me again." And yet he tucks himself in against Thorin, letting him take his weight, and finds his eyes won't open. "We are an absolute mess. What kind of ballads are going to be written about the pair of us? 'Won a great big battle, reclaimed the Lonely Mountain, and then were done in by bureaucracy'. That's just," he yawns, "That's going to need some editing."

"You'd probably be the best one for the job," Thorin says, as Bilbo lays down, Thorin's regal bearing somewhat ruined by the way he yawns. "Mahal, this really will be the death of me. Why don't we ride off and reclaim Moria instead?"

"Oh yes, a battle with Durin's Bane, sounds thrilling," Bilbo gets himself tucked in, content when Thorin sits beside him. He moves over, across the too-big bed, and tugs on Thorin's arm. "Lie down, Thorin. You might as well stay, at this point." He stretches out luxuriously on the bed, enjoying the warmth.

"You're sure you don't mind?" Thorin asks, even as Bilbo hears his boots thump the floor.

"We practically slept on top of each other for the whole journey, Thorin, I think we can manage to share a bed just fine." Truthfully, he's missed having someone else near when he sleeps. It's comforting. Maybe he should ask Thorin for a dog. "Or are you imagining the gossip? My husband seen coming out of my rooms in the morning, how scandalous." He snickers to himself and buries his face in the soft pillow. "Go to sleep Thorin. We'll fix this mess in the morning."

He hears rather than sees Thorin lie down on the pillow next to him, the covers lifting as he crawls beneath them. His body is heavy and warm in the bed beside him, and Bilbo squirms a bit closer under the guise of getting settled. "Don't worry. Fíli or Kíli will make another mess to clean up before we get too bored."

"I knew they would prove useful somehow." Thorin rumbles. "You know, I would not mind if he would say yes. He'd be good for him."

Bilbo sniffs and stifles another yawn. "Except either Dori or Nori would kill him first."

His husband is quiet for a moment, and he thinks he's fallen asleep, but then he says, "King Kíli."

"With good horses, we could reach Moria in a very timely fashion."

The last thing he remembers hearing before falling asleep is Thorin laughing into the pillow.

Chapter End Notes

Oh Dáin. You're so canny. What are you up to, making your cousin all mad and stuff, that's just...

Wait. How did this get bigger than four chapters? I had a plan damn it. A PLAN

(Pulls hat down over head)

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

In which Bilbo is a clumsy thief, not even capable of stealing a kiss.

Chapter Notes

A/N This is very long. I am very tired. Good night.

He wakes first, and is happy for it. He gets a few brief minutes to linger over Thorin's sleeping form, and he uses every moment, trying to commit the sight to memory.

Thorin sleeps deeply, unlike how he did on the road. His face is half-buried in the pillow, black hair falling over his face and shoulders, the grey hidden for now in the shadows of the closed curtains. The fire has been stirred, a servant having crept in and done so without waking them probably an hour or so ago, not an easy task with either of them.

He reaches out and brushes the loose hair away from Thorin's face. Thorin stirs, shifting over to lie on his back, but does not wake just yet.

He is very handsome, Bilbo thinks, and he wonders if he is simply because Bilbo loves him so.

He only means it as another secret, something to hold to his heart and cherish. He's never had so much as a proper kiss from his husband, and though he never expected so much as a marriage, he thinks he's allowed to wish for more.

He knows that's no excuse as he leans over, and presses his mouth to Thorin's. It's wrong to take something not freely given, that he's well aware of, but for just a moment, the pain in his heart is enough he allows himself to be horribly selfish.

It's only fitting that Thorin's hand comes to cup his face as he does it, pushing him back, his eyes open and startled.

Bilbo feels something in his chest crack.

“What-?” Thorin manages, his hand still on Bilbo's jaw.

“I'm so sorry,” Bilbo babbles, ducking away from his hand and out of the bed. “Thorin, I'm so sorry, I don't know what came over me, I just, I don't know, I'm sorry,”

Thorin is watching him with hooded eyes as he echoes, “You’re sorry?”

“Yes, Thorin, what else do you want me to say?” He wants to swear, wishes he knew some good ones, strong enough to fit the miserable situation he’s put himself in with his weakness. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what came over me.”

Thorin is silent in the bed, and Bilbo can’t for the life of him read his expression.

They’re both saved from the row he knows they’re going to have eventually when someone all but pounds on the door to the bedroom. It startles them both, but Bilbo isn’t surprised to see Dís on the other side, Kíli in tow. No one but her would dare enter any of their rooms without invitation, or knock on Bilbo’s bedroom door in such a way. She looks furious, but there’s a moment when she takes in the fact that Bilbo’s not alone, her eyes widening just a hair.

Kíli smirks, and Bilbo wishes he was tall enough to cuff him around the ear.

“Dís, what’s wrong?” he asks, trying to control the situation. Behind him, he hears Thorin climb out of the bed, fabric rustling as he adjusts his clothes. “Where’s Fíli?”

“Oh, you mean my oldest son and heir to the throne?” she asks in response, and takes her younger son by the back of the neck. “Kíli, why don’t you tell your uncles where your brother is?”

Bilbo doesn’t even want to know. He takes a deep breath and pinches the bridge of his nose, trying to keep his temper under control. Whatever Fíli’s done, Kíli might have helped, but it’s still not his fault, and Bilbo will not shout at him. For one, it’s too early.

“Where is your brother?” Bilbo asks. Thorin is at his back now, silent, but likely glaring at the boy judging from the way Kíli is squirming. “Thorin, that’s not helpful. Kíli, answer me, now.”

His husband moves past him into the sitting room, too fast for Bilbo to see his expression, but there’s been a set of clothes neatly placed on the larger table, along with some other items, like Thorin’s hairbrush. A thoughtful servant had likely guessed Thorin would not have much time to get himself back to his own rooms and together, considering what had probably been assumed about Thorin spending the night.

He’d bathed the night before, but Thorin hadn’t, and he hitches his chin towards Bilbo’s bedroom again before entering, asking permission while Kíli fumbles for an explanation. Bilbo nods, and moves aside for him, so he can go into Bilbo’s private bath. It’s small, for Bilbo’s station, but it’s bigger than the one he had in Bag End, and better than they had on the road. For one, there’s hot water.

Once Thorin is out of sight, Kíli’s nerves seem to ease somewhat, though not much, with his mother still there. “Where is your brother?” Bilbo asks again, more gently.

Kíli winces then confesses, looking guilty about the whole affair. “Fíli snuck out after supper. He promised he’d be back by morning, so I didn’t say anything then.”

His mother swears colourfully, using phrases that could make many a Dwarf blush, much less a Hobbit, before rounding on her son. “What is wrong with the pair of you?” she scolds, sounding almost desperate. “Did either of you think for a moment about what would happen if he didn’t make it back in time? Are you both so self-centred you cannot comprehend that Erebor does not revolve around either of you and your wants?”

“He only wanted a moment with Ori, you know how Dori is.” This he uses to appeal to Bilbo. “He won’t let Ori see him anymore, that’s why they always meet in the Library. Dori was in the Guild Halls last night, and Fíli was nervous about today. Ori always gets him to relax.” He pauses, then his eyes widen as his mother glares. “Not just like that! Though I’m sure...not that they would in Dori’s house, they’re not even properly courting, of course...” He stumbles over his bad lie for his brother, seems to lose himself, and tries again. “You know how Ori is, he’s a thinker. He makes Fíli think a bit better, so he just wanted a few hours with him. He probably fell asleep, is all, you know he’ll be back soon.”

“Regardless,” Bilbo says, “you both know better. You should never have let him leave.” Still, this isn’t Kíli’s fault; it’s Fíli’s, and Bilbo won’t hold Kíli accountable, though Dís and probably Thorin want to throttle them both. Bilbo can’t say he blames them, really. “I need to dress. Dís-”

“Tea?” she suggests, in empathy.

“Please,” he begs, grateful for her. “I’ll be just a moment.”

He ducks in and shuts the doors. His bathroom doors are still closed, the sound of the water filtering through the heavy things. He’s grateful for that too. He has no idea what to say to Thorin right now, how to excuse himself and his inexcusable actions. All that Thorin gives, their ease with one another now, and he’s ruined it all.

He dresses quickly and fixes himself up at his dressing table. He thinks about waiting for Thorin to finish before cleaning his teeth, but they’re likely pressed for time, and he needs to get his hair in order too.

He sighs, and knocks on the door. Thorin opens it, thankfully mostly dressed now, his hair a bit damp over his shoulder. Bilbo steps in, not looking up at Thorin while he does. With his face washed and his teeth clean, he feels a bit more awake, if not any better about his coming day. He combs his hair, and leaves, joining Thorin in the bedroom, where he’s finishing dressing. Thorin is choosing to wear the armour and weapons he wore the day previous, the ones left in Bilbo’s room, but it’s not as though any of Dáin’s expect any better from his husband. The gauntlets he wears are the same ones he wore on the journey, and they’re the ones he usually favours. He now wears his swords at his waist instead of his back when in Erebor, but besides that, there’s little difference now between the Dwarf he met in his kitchen that one night so long ago.

“I am sorry,” he says, without thinking, and he’s not only apologizing for the kiss. He’s apologizing for loving Thorin, for not being content with what he has of him, for wanting more of his king. It’s not enough, will never be, and he knows it even before he sees how Thorin stiffens at the dressing table, his fingers still working at his braids.

“We will discuss it later,” Thorin says, and Bilbo’s heart sinks. He really has no desire to do that, but he should have known Thorin would not simply let it go. He’ll want to know why Bilbo did such a thing, why he thought he had the right to take any such liberties with him. Never mind that he’s his bloody husband, of course. “After Fíli and Dáin have been dealt with.”

“As you wish,” he replies, grabbing his ring off of the dressing table. Thorin’s eyes follow it as he slips it on his finger, and Bilbo adjusts it self-consciously. “I’ll go see if Fíli has been found.”

“If not, we know where he is.” Thorin finishes one braid and ties it off.

Bilbo can’t help but smile. “Dead in a ditch after Dori caught him in Ori’s bedroom?”

Thorin chuckles, and says again, “King Kíli.”

“Please try not to make me faint so early in the morning, Thorin,” he chides him, and the return of their usual ease gives him hope they can move past this little incident, and forget. And Bilbo will be more careful about his own feelings, and how they show themselves to Thorin.

In his sitting room, Dís and Kíli are waiting with tea. Kíli’s hair is still down, he notices for the first time, meaning Dís had dragged him out of his room before he’d finished dressing. He’s not even wearing any jewellery. They’ll have to get him ready too before breakfast.

He’s barely had time for half his tea before the door opens, admitting Nori and Fíli at last. Nori’s got him by the arm, but Fíli’s not fighting back too hard, which means Nori’s got a knife on him somewhere they can’t see. It would be horribly treasonous if Bilbo wasn’t so sympathetic towards him.

“Look what I found trying to sneak out my baby brother’s window this morning.” Nori says, giving Fíli a shake. “A little princeling. I thought you might be missing him.” He releases him into the room, and Bilbo spots the knife in question slipping back up Nori’s sleeve, thanks only to the bright morning light from Bilbo’s windows catching on the metal.

“Ah.” Fíli says, and seems to struggle for something else to say as he looks around at them all. “Good morning?” It sounds like a question, and all his mother has to do is raise an eyebrow for him to say, “Perhaps not.”

“Fíli, my sweet,” Dís greets, with a smile that makes even Bilbo shudder. Kíli visibly recoils in his chair. “What a fine night it was last night, wouldn’t you agree? Your brother was just telling me what a lovely view you must have gotten when you snuck out of our home and into the artisan’s quarters. I understand they’ve restrung the lanterns on Loom Street. Always quite a sight, that.”

There’s a silent exchange between the brothers, Fíli glaring while Kíli gestures furiously and not very subtly at their mother, Bilbo, and his closed bedroom doors.

“It is quite a sight, my lady,” Nori agrees. “Thankfully, no one saw any more interesting sights.” He means that Fíli’s visit had gone unnoticed by anyone, a small mercy. Gossip is the last thing they need. “You’re lucky it was me coming home this morning, not Dori, lad, or you wouldn’t be so pretty right now.”

“He wouldn’t be in one piece,” Kíli chuckles, but stops when he’s glared at by the four of them.

The bedroom opens, and Thorin emerges at last, his braids neat, and all his weapons and armour in place. If Nori’s surprised to see him there, he doesn’t show it, but he does look at Bilbo with a bit of a leer.

When Fíli sees him, he pales a bit. “Uncle.” He nods respectfully.

Thorin raises his eyebrows, but before he can start shouting, Bilbo steps in. He goes to Thorin’s side, and places a hand on his arm to get his attention. His husband looks down at him, eyebrows raised, waiting for what he has to say on the matter. “He needs to get dressed and cleaned up, Thorin. There’ll be time for reprimands later.”

Thorin considers it, the turn of his thoughts apparent in his eyes.

“Let me speak to him first,” Bilbo insists. “Please.” In this, Thorin has to know he’s right. He knows Bilbo has a better handle on his temper than Thorin does, and that Fíli is no longer a child, to be reprimanded by shouts and threats of punishment. He needs to be reasoned with like an adult, and that’s what Bilbo is good at. “Please.”

There’s a pause where he worries Thorin is going to shout anyway, but instead he nods and steps away to face the windows, his arms clasped behind his back.

Relieved, Bilbo turns to the boys. “Fíli, Kíli, come with me, now.” He steps forward and takes Fíli by the elbow, more gently than Nori, Kíli on his heels. “Unless you’d like to stay with them,” he hisses, and both boys pale. They practically pull Bilbo out of the room, and once in the hall, Bilbo pushes them in the direction of Fíli’s room. “You are going to get washed up and dressed properly, now, and Kíli, you are going to fix your hair.”

“What happened to your hair?” Fíli asks, pulling at his brother’s tangled locks.

“Mum. You *owe* me,” Kíli answers, and that’s enough for both of them.

Once in Fíli’s room, Kíli throws himself on the bed, combing his fingers through the mess. Bilbo tosses him an actual comb from Fíli’s messy dressing table, and a pair of proper hair ties as well. “Put some beads in too. You are a prince of Erebor, look like it, or so help me, I’ll take a pair of scissors to you.” Kíli blanches, and does as he’s told.

A servant appears at the door, looking terrified, carrying a tray with a bowl and pitcher of hot water, along with fresh towels. “Her Highness thought this might be useful,” he stammers, and Bilbo has him place it on the table meant for it, pushing aside a set of daggers on it with only a small eye roll.

“You may leave,” Bilbo says, and the poor creature all but runs. “Fíli, get your face washed, now.”

“Alright, alright.” He strips off his upper layers, leaving himself in just his breeches and boots, while Bilbo sorts through his wardrobe until he finds something clean and pressed.

“I would like an explanation now, if you please, and so help you, it had better be a good one if you expect me to save you from your uncle and your mother. And if you think Nori won’t tell Dori, you have lost any common sense you ever had.”

Fíli huffs and scrubs at his face before cleaning his teeth. “I overslept! I never meant to stay the night, but it’s hard to leave right after, it makes me feel like I’m treating him like a, a -”

“Whore?” Kíli suggest cheerily.

“Shut it, you great tattle-tale.” Fíli glares at him in his mirror, as he spits and wipes his mouth. “I’m sorry, all right? I made it back, didn’t I?”

Bilbo isn’t listening, too busy inspecting Fíli’s braids. When he realises he’s seeing what he thinks he’s seeing, he grabs him by his good ear and yanks him down to his level, Fíli yelping in pain as he does so.

“You deserve that,” Kíli drawls from the bed, making no move to help as Fíli tries to keep his balance down at Bilbo’s height.

“Fíli.” Bilbo’s voice is low and dangerous and he is going to *murder* him. “Is this bridal veil in your braid?”

He feels Kíli perk up in interest at the pair of them, as Fíli stares at him. He attempts to smile winningly, then says, “That depends on whether or not you’re going to tell Thorin if I say yes.”

“Thorin is not who you need to be worrying about!” He twists Fíli’s ear once, then releases him. The prince stands up straight again, looking put out over being treated like a child. Bilbo doesn’t blame him, but bridal veil in his bloody braids, and all without a word, is a damned childish thing to do.

“King Kíli,” Kíli crows. “I like the sound of it.”

“Shut it!” Fíli shouts, yanking his blue under-tunic down over his head.

“Well either Thorin or Bilbo is going to kill you now, or Dori will when he finds out. My money is on Dori, personally -” And that’s when Fíli dives on his brother, knocking him off the bed and pinning him to the floor, or trying to, as they grapple.

Bilbo is content to let them for a moment, aggravated with the pair of them, and besides that, it’ll get their nerves out. When Kíli manages to get his older brother down on his stomach with his head in a lock, he breaks it up, ordering Kíli off and throwing Fíli his hair brush. “Get your hair neat, and finish getting dressed.” He remembers Kíli, and pulls the crib sheet out of his pocket, handing it to the younger prince. “Study this, now.”

“Yes, Bilbo,” Kíli replies dully, concentrating on it, his lips moving with the words. He remembers things better if he says them aloud, but he’s learned to be quiet about it.

Fíli has all his braids out, brushing his hair smooth. The bridal veil sits on the dressing table, the waxy flowers not wilting yet. “Where did you get them?” Bilbo asks tiredly. “They’re not in season.”

“Hothouse in Dale,” Fíli answers, beginning on his moustache. Bilbo sits him down and starts on his hair to help him along, meeting his eyes in the mirror.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have lost my temper.” Seems he’s doing a lot of apologizing this morning. “He consented then?” That is a surprise. The first time, when Ori had refused him, Fíli had all but destroyed the training grounds, slashing apart dummy after dummy, and even Kíli was afraid to go too close. “He really consented?”

“Try not to sound so surprised, he does love me,” Fíli replies waspishly. “He was going to say yes eventually. He did, last night. He’s not ready for a date, but he will marry me.”

Kíli groans. “Mum’s going to have brides lined up in the halls for me, you stupid bastard.”

“Kíli,” Bilbo warns.

“I don’t want to get married yet.” He rolls over and buries his face in the bed. “S work.”

Fíli finishes his moustache, and begins on his beard, plaiting it quickly. When Bilbo starts on his side, Fíli waves him off. “You don’t know how to put in engagement beads,” he explains, pulling out a small wooden box. He shows them to Bilbo, elaborate, pretty things with one hole at the top and two at the bottom. “They were supposed to be for Thorin, but then you and him just skipped all that, so he gave them to me. They were our grandfather’s before him.”

He wonders what Thorin would have looked like, with these fine beads in his hair. They’re meant for the king or the crown prince, he suspects, from the symbols etched in. Ori’s are probably simpler. He touches his own hair, imagines having to go through all this trouble every day.

“Dori won’t consent,” he says, twisting Thorin’s ring back and forth on his finger. “Especially after Nori caught you coming out the window, like a thief.”

“He already stole what Ori -”

“Kíli!” Bilbo warns, while Fíli glares at his brother.

“I’m the Crown Prince of Erebor, so they can sod off.” Fíli gets one through his hair with too much ease. He’s been practicing. “Is Dáin going to try to make me look like a fool in front of his council?” Bilbo’s surprise must show, because he scoffs. “You all treat me like an idiot. I’m not, you know. I know what his lot are up to. They can’t stand me, and they know I can’t stand them. They want Dáin to be king. Well, they can all sod off too. I’m going to be king, and Ori’s going to be my consort. That’s all there is to it now.”

“You’re over-simplifying things,” Bilbo admonishes, still a bit taken aback. Sometimes he forgets that Fíli is actually an adult, not helped by how he and his brother play still. Yet, like the day of Dáin’s arrival, he sees now the king Fíli can be, when he puts his mind to it. “But yes, I suspect someone will make an unkind comment about those beads. You’ve gone about things completely the wrong way, and you’ve caused more than one future headache for myself and your uncle. Do you think you can handle all of it?”

“I’m going to be king, one day.” Fíli replies firmly, tying off his hair, and standing to finish getting dressed. “If I couldn’t face a few advisors and their snide ways, I wouldn’t deserve to be. I’m not ashamed of my choice.” Dressed, he laces up his nice vambraces, with the pattern of feathers worked into the leather, and finds the matching scabbard. Instead of Dáin’s gift, he selects his usual swords, sliding them into place.

Once done, he looks like the Crown Prince again, and Bilbo feels something very fond swell in his chest. He *is* fond of the boys, he always tells people. *Very* fond. They’re even dear to him, he might say.

“Uncle?” Fíli asks, his brow furrowed, and for a second Bilbo almost checks for Thorin before remembering that no, that’s him too now.

He steps forward, and straightens one of his vambraces, praying his voice stays steady. “You should wear a ring or two. You as well, Kíli. You two should look your best.” He chooses one himself for Fíli, a silver one with an amethyst to go with the blues and greens he’s wearing, and lets him put one with a small emerald on the other hand. “There, now you look very fine.” When Kíli comes to stand beside him, wearing one of his brother’s rings, and some nice beads with tiny slivers of gems set in, they make a good set. “Thorin might be displeased now, but at least you’ll present yourselves well for him.”

They preen together, and though they’re as different as night and day in colouring, they look very much alike when they smile. *Fond*, oh, who is he fooling? He’s so furious with Fíli, and they will all have words later, but for now, he’ll just be very proud of them both.

“Urm,” Kíli shifts. “Do I sit on Thorin’s left, or his right?”

Bilbo shakes his head and sighs.

“The left, Kíli,” he reminds him. “The left.”

“Right,” he nods, and his brother elbows him.

“No,” Fíli hisses. “The left, I’m on the right!”

“I know that!”

They’re saved another tussle by a knock on the door, and it cracking open to reveal Thorin. Fíli stands straight as he enters, like he’s waiting for Thorin to say something, his uncle looking him over closely. Bilbo sees when he notices the beads, and as Thorin passes, he touches his arm, fingers light over the heavy fabric of his sleeve, but Thorin feels him. He glances down, and his expression softens, before he turns back.

“So,” Thorin sighs heavily. “How drunk did you have to get him?”

Kíli erupts in laughter as Fíli scowls, but Thorin soothes the hurt quick by pulling him close in an embrace. Fíli holds stiff for only a second before he returns it, grinning, and his smile only grows when Thorin steps back and claps him on the shoulder. It drops like a stone when Thorin says, “You’ll be telling your mother on your own.”

Kíli’s laughter turns to gasps for air as he uses the post of Fíli’s bed to stay standing, Fíli looking a bit ill.

“Come, husband,” Thorin holds his arm out and Bilbo takes it gladly. “Time for you to make me look personable.”

“Don’t go asking for the moon, or anything,” Bilbo replies, leaning on him a bit more than necessary as he leads the two of them out of Fíli’s room, Fíli and Kíli trailing, the latter’s laughter muffled into his sleeve. “Who is down there already? Dáin, I’m sure,”

Thorin bristles a bit and nods. “Dáin is there, yes, and apparently has asked after you.”

“Has he?” Bilbo almost wrinkles his nose, but manages not to. He doesn’t want to be rude. “And who else?”

“Wrain, Liir, their spouses, and that lady, what is her name?”

Bilbo thinks on it for a moment before remembering. “You mean Balar?”

“That one, yes, she’s there. Is she not married?” he asks, looking back at Kíli significantly. The younger prince pales as Fíli smirks unkindly. “Not a word. Had your brother expressed more decorum, you would not be on the chopping block, so if anyone must be blamed, it’s him.”

Bilbo gives his husband a shrewd look, and gets innocence in return. They’ll have to talk about it later, with Dís and Balin. If Dís dislikes her, there’s no point, and Balin will have to tell them if she’s a worthwhile candidate. It would be terribly good fortune, to have Kíli married to the pretty young warrior on Dáin’s council, and from what Bilbo can tell, she’d keep him in line with little trouble.

“First thing when I see Dori, I’m telling him about that time in Ered Luin, after the Solstice,” he hears Kíli hiss to Fíli, Fíli doing something to make him yelp in reply. Thorin chuckles beside him, and Bilbo sighs to himself. Say what they might about Fíli, but Bilbo strongly believes Thorin was a good deal more like his sister-sons than anyone remembers.

Bilbo pinches his arm a bit, reminding him to behave, but Thorin still looks entirely too pleased with himself. Thorin touches the hand Bilbo has on his arm with his free one right as they walk in the room, thumb rubbing the stone of the ring, and for a moment, Bilbo is almost overwhelmed with the urge to kiss him. It’s the stress of the morning, and Fíli and his silly beads that does it, but this time he restrains himself.

If only he had managed such control earlier. Oh, he admonishes himself, you great idiot, you were doing so well.

“Good morning.” Dáin has his eyebrows raised at them, that stupid smile on his face again. He's a welcome distraction, and Bilbo leaves Thorin's side to go to him, and the advisor he stands with, Lord Liir, his wife beside him. She's not fond of Bilbo, nor does she hate him, so she's really his best option. Neither Lord Wrain or his husband like him at all.

“A fine one, Dáin,” he replies, and immediately curses himself for forgetting Dáin's title in company. He's done nothing but blunder since he woke, hasn't he? “Forgive me, my lords, my lady.” He nods politely to Liir's wife. “It was a long night.”

“I suppose I will have to,” Dáin says, and Liir's wife, Basha, narrows her eyes, not meanly, but curious, though about what, Bilbo's not sure just yet. In any case, Dáin's eyes widen, and he forgets himself as well, asking, “Master Baggins, are those engagement beads in Prince Fíli's hair?” He blinks, and smiles. “Pray, now you must forgive me, your Highness, but I'm a little surprised. I did not even know he was courting anyone.”

Thorin has taken his seat at the head of the table, deep in conversation with Balin as the boys trail him, Fíli sitting on his right, Kíli on his left, Balin behind him. Dís sits beside her younger son, leaving the seat beside Fíli open for Bilbo. Fíli looks to him now with pleading eyes, as the other guests approach. “His intended is rather private, I'm afraid,” he replies easily. “You will meet him in time.” Yes, there's an idea, a small party with Ori and his brothers, to celebrate the engagement. Dáin's council could be invited, giving Kíli time to meet Lady Balar properly, and they would be pleased by being allowed to a seemingly private affair.

His mind is off and going, effectively distracting him from his mistake from earlier, as Dáin sits beside him at the table. He grins at Dís, but she pretends not to see it. He sighs, and turns to Bilbo. “My lovely cousin has never forgiven me for the time I broke her favourite toy sword.”

“You tossed it in the river,” she replies sharply, as a servant pours her tea.

Dáin sighs at Bilbo, in a very put-upon way, and he can't help but laugh a bit. Dís can hold a grudge like no other, and makes Thorin look a perfect politician by comparison. Bilbo supposes that like Kíli, since she wasn't the heir, she never saw much need to learn better, and besides that, he's learned Dwarf manners and Hobbit manners are two very different things. If anything, her disdain seems to make Dáin all the more cheerful.

There's a pinch to his thigh, and he turns to look at Fíli casually, asking for the sugar even as he asks what's wrong with his expression. Fíli tilts his head at Thorin a little, wagging his eyebrows subtly. His husband is giving him a hard, unreadable look, and Bilbo's stomach sinks. He's distracted himself from this morning, but Thorin has very obviously not, and Bilbo's not looking forward to the discussion they're sure to have later about it.

He plays with his ring miserably for a second, then gets himself under control and turns back to Dáin with a smile. He doesn't have time for this nonsense, neither of them do.

He's never even had a proper kiss from his husband though, and the thought makes his stomach hurt.

There's no time for this, he reminds himself more forcefully, not with Dáin and the council and all of them here. He can allow himself to fall apart in his rooms later, when everything is taken care of.

Once breakfast is finished, it's time for the actual work to begin. The servants clear the food and dishes, and are replaced by scribes, not including Ori. He feels Fíli's disappointment. Perhaps he asked for Ori to come to this one, but it's not in his nature to enjoy the politics of the kingdom. Ori prefers the Library and his own work, Bilbo's noticed. He hopes Fíli isn't actually bullying him into something he doesn't want to do. He wouldn't mean to, but his personality is more forceful than Ori's, and Ori is easily swayed.

He'll have to look into this, he knows.

“Your Guild Halls look like a battleground, your Majesty.” Dain says, from beside Bilbo. “When I sent an envoy last night, they came back this morning wounded.” He chuckles. “And that was the envoy I sent to the Teachers' Guild.”

“Lucky you stayed away from the Weavers' Guild and the Tailor' and Seamstress' Guild. They're having a bit of a disagreement between them over territory. The sort that involves axes and needles being sharpened,” Fíli jokes, getting a smile out of Lord Liir and one his wife hides behind her napkin. “Our apologies if your envoy was harmed.”

Thorin looks pleased with him, and Dáin does with the apology. “He'll be fine, after his nose sets.”

“What condition is your Jewellers' Guild in?” Lady Balar asks, and to Bilbo's relief, Kíli actually seems interested now. “Only that's my trade, and I'm not afraid of a few thrown tools.”

“They're fine,” Kíli answers, angling himself towards her, looking around Lord Liir to speak to her. “They bought their territory back, and hired out the Blacksmiths' Guild to guard the borders from any squatters.”

The lady smiles with pride. “Trust our lot to know how to do it properly,” she says to Kíli. She's noticed his braids then, the ones that mark him as a jeweller as well, and match hers. She has more beads in hers, but they're both masters, marked by the plain silver beads they wear at the end of the braids. “How is the Guild House looking?”

“Clean and neat.” Kíli and she share a smile, and Bilbo glances at Thorin hopefully. If they get along well enough, and she has no intended, perhaps they might yet manage to gain an alliance between themselves and Dáin's people.

At least something in the morning is going right.

“Then that's where I'll go, Lord Dáin,” Lady Balar says firmly.

“Perhaps you'd like an escort, my lady.” Bilbo nods to Kíli. “His Highness would be happy to show you, I'm sure.”

After that, things run smoothly, thankfully, with Fíli and Kíli conducting themselves perfectly. There's a hiccup, when Lord Wrain comments on Fíli's beads, but Fíli doesn't rise to the bait. Instead, he smiles, and rolls one between the pads of his fingers. “My engagement has been a long time coming, my lord,” he says, to Wrain's almost insulting words on young love and rushing. “My intended and I have known each other since we were children, in Ered Luin, when I was nothing but a musician. I've waited a long time to have enough to offer him and his family.”

It's subtle, more so than Wrain's own comment, but the advisor hears it for what it is, to judge by the sour look on his face.

By the time it's over, they've opened negotiations for young apprentices and journeymen to be brought to Erebor, but no more masters. Dís, Kíli, and Fíli all agree that the masters in Erebor would be insulted, and Thorin lets their opinion stand. He's a blacksmith, technically, but it wouldn't do well for him to make the decision for the Blacksmiths' Guild, especially since he's not the Grandmaster of the guild. Dís is a member of the Armourers', Kíli belongs to the Jewellers', and Fíli is in the Musicians' Guild though, so they can offer a more diverse opinion. He makes a note to himself to speak to the 'Ri Brothers today about the Weavers' Guild, when they inevitably come up to discuss the change in situation between the boys.

Oh, he's going to have to handle all of that too, with Dís and Thorin. He hopes Nori can calm Dori down beforehand. He might be angry about just how he found Fíli this morning, but Nori likes him well enough, and Bilbo had never seen any sign he disapproved of the two the way Dori does.

They break after lunch, Dáin and his advisors likely going to talk amongst themselves about what goals they had met, and needed to, while filling in the rest of the advisors he'd brought with him. Their own group needs to discuss just what they're going to do to convince the Guilds to allow outsiders to train with them, but they don't have another option at this point. They cannot allow more troops in Erebor, but they need to keep Dáin's people happy, and besides that, Bilbo is sympathetic towards the ones who are displaced from Erebor. They only want to come home, just like everyone else.

“Master Baggins,” Dáin says, stalling him as they all filter out. “A word?”

He can feel Thorin's eyes on him, and knows he's going to try to get his own word in before anything else. Bilbo's not yet ready for that conversation, so he smiles at Dáin and stays, the lord's hand on his elbow steering him away from the rest, so their words are a bit more private. “Is something the matter?”

“No, nothing like that. Only I would like to give my cousin and his intended an engagement present, and I suspect my last gift was not to his liking. And of course I have no idea what would suit his intended.” He doesn't seem offended that Fíli's not terribly fond of the pretty weapons he'd been given, so there's that.

“It's not my place to reveal what Fíli's intended would rather not,” Bilbo replies. Ori would be miserable at being surprised in such a way, and Fíli would likely feel the consequences. “I hope you will get to meet them before you leave though. We shall see at arranging something.” Again with the touching, as Dáin puts a hand on his shoulder.

Thorin and the rest are waiting for him, and Fíli looks desperate again. He knows he has Bilbo in his corner, and he must be frightened his mother isn't. If Thorin tries to defend the prince, all that will happen is a row between the siblings. Bilbo and Balin together will hopefully inspire cooler heads, especially when Dori and Nori are involved.

“Forgive me, Dáin,” he says. “My husband is waiting.”

Dáin's smile quirks. “So he is.”

Thorin offers his arm when Bilbo approaches, and he takes it, hardly noticing when Thorin covers the hand with his own. He's honestly working on not noticing Thorin at all, choosing to direct his attention towards everyone and anything else. He can't stand the feeling he gets every time he thinks about that stupid kiss, and the way it had felt to have Thorin's hand on him, pushing him away.

If he thinks about it, he'll start to cry, he just knows it.

In his rooms, there's tea laid out already, but more importantly, Nori and Ori are waiting. Nori at least doesn't look like he's going to throttle Fíli, but he is spinning his knife in a very impressive show of dexterity.

“Ori,” Dís steps forward, and touches her forehead to his, clasping his shoulders. He smiles shyly at her, and returns the gesture, his touch light on her elbows. “At least it's you my foolish son chose. I could not ask for a better child to accept into my family.”

“Thank you, Lady Dís.” She lets him go, so Thorin can do the same. “Your Majesty.”

“I think that's enough of that,” Thorin says, clapping him on the shoulder. “Even if you were not blessing my sister-son in such a way, you and your brothers can count yourselves among the few who can address me by name.”

Ori smiles, and nods. “Thorin,” he corrects, his smile only growing as Fíli finally comes to stand by his side, brushing his engagement braid back behind his ear.

“Well, glad to see all this going well.” Nori still has his knife in hand, but he pointedly puts it down when he sees he's got Fíli's attention. He smiles, all charm, and sweeps his arms towards the doors that lead to Bilbo's terrace. “If you would join me outside, Fíli, I think it's time you and I have a proper word.”

Fíli makes to press back to his uncle, but Thorin pushes him forward. “Actions have consequences, Fíli. Best you learn that now.” He looks to Bilbo and Dís next, but Bilbo's not much inclined to help him with this, and his mother only arches an elegant eyebrow. “Go on.”

“Nori,” Ori says warily.

“No worries little brother, you shall have your intended back with as many bits as he left you with.” Nori assures him, and shuts the door firmly behind himself and Fíli. They can see him throw an arm around Fíli's shoulders as they walk out further, and it at least doesn't look like he's threatening him very much.

“One down,” Thorin says, to his sister, and she sighs, ruffling her youngest son's hair.

“Promise me you won't go and get engaged behind your poor mother's back, sweetling,” she pleads.

“Considering you'll probably arrange my marriage, Mother, I don't see that being a problem.”

Dís and Thorin start speaking in low voices, and Kíli takes the opportunity to investigate the tea, Bilbo gently leading Ori to the table as well. He looks genuinely happy, something within lit, and it reassures Bilbo about his and Fíli's relationship. He'd hoped Thorin was only mostly joking about Fíli bullying him into it, and it looks like he was. Ori seems content with his choice, if not overly and understandably anxious.

“Does Dori know yet?” he asks, and Ori nods.

“Nori went down and told him, but he can't leave the Guild Hall just yet. The territory dispute with the Tailors' and Seamstress' is finally making some headway.” He takes the offered plate of tea sandwiches from Kíli happily. “Dori had to break their Grandmaster's nose, but it wasn't too bad.”

Sometimes, Bilbo doesn't think he'll ever understand Dwarrows.

“Good to hear,” he says, because it's polite. “How did he take it? Did Nori say?”

“Better than we thought he might. He's not threatening to come challenge Fíli's claim, or anything, so there's that.” He eats more neatly than Kíli, who likes to openly dunk his biscuits in his tea. “I think he understands that I mean it, and that I didn't want to refuse him before.” He swallows. “Only, it's just, the other parts, you know, what you do,”

“Being Consort, you mean?” Bilbo tries to be kind about it. “It's not an easy job. Hopefully, it will be a long time before you have to do it. Until then, a long engagement?”

Ori nods. “I think it would be a good idea, to give Dori time to get used to it. He was glad, when I refused him, you know, that first time.” He fingers the braid that still has the bridal veil in it, smiling a little to himself. “He thinks it's too much. Marriage to Fíli.” He dares to look up at Bilbo, that secret smile just barely tugging up the corners of his lips as he fights it, perhaps wanting to seem serious. “But there's no point, you know. Fíli always gets his way, in the end. And I...” He bites his lip. “Why should I keep refusing him, when I don't want to? It just doesn't make any sense.”

“No, it doesn't.” Bilbo agrees. “Are you alright with what it means, married to a prince? Being his husband?”

“No,” Ori answers honestly. “Not at all. And I know I’d never be as good at it as you are, all that you do. But I thought maybe you could teach me, in the meantime, and I could at least be alright at it.” He nods decidedly. “I will at least try, for him. I don’t want to, really, you know. But I want to be with him.”

It’s well-spoken, and as loving as Bilbo can ask for, for Fíli’s future spouse. “Well, then I suppose we’ll just have to make the best of it. Lucky you have me. Hobbits are very good at making the best of things.”

He’s going to have that put to the test tonight, he knows, and in the coming days. Thorin is still speaking with Dís, but he’s gone serious, and so has she. He’s not sure what they’re discussing, but he’s sure Thorin will speak to him about it later.

At least he hopes Thorin will speak to him later.

Nori and Fíli come back in, and if Fíli looks a bit pale, he’s all in one piece and unbruised. “All right then,” Nori says, to his brother. “Fíli understands how it is now, don’t you? ‘Course you do.” He pats Fíli on the back, then turns to Thorin and Dís. “Now it’s time we had a proper negotiation, before Dori gets here, so if you please, your Majesty, my Lady,”

Ori stands without being told, and follows his brother back out. Dís goes as well, with her brother, which makes sense to Bilbo, since Thorin’s been like a parent to the boys. This must be the part where the promises and such are made. Hobbits aren’t too dissimilar, even if dowries aren’t quite the same between them. He doubts the boys are too interested in the patterns of their linens, after all.

Kíli seems unbothered by the whole thing.

“You don’t mind Fíli and Ori getting married?” No one’s really been too concerned with Kíli’s opinion on the whole thing, and considering what it means for him and his future marriage, he thinks it’s time someone did.

“I like Ori. Ori loves Fíli, Fíli loves him.” And that seems to be all that matters to him. Out of biscuits, he’s eyeing his tea suspiciously now. He’s never taken to it, but his mother won’t let him have ale this early in the day. “Lady Balar is a good match for me. We’re both jewellers, and she’s only a bit older than me.”

“You like her then?” Bilbo asks, adding more sugar to his own tea.

Kíli shrugs. “I don’t know yet. I could, if you want me to.”

“That’s not exactly the foundation for a good marriage, Kíli,” Bilbo admonishes quietly. “We want you happily married, not miserable, or just going through the motions. I’m not asking you to love the lady, I know that might not be possible, but you could at least be friends with whoever you choose.”

The youngest prince nods. “That makes sense. I don’t have a One, you know, so it’s all the same to me.”

“You don’t?” Bilbo asks, puzzled. “I thought all of you had one?”

“No,” Kíli shakes his head. “I don’t have the Longing, and honestly, I’m glad for it. It seems like an awful lot of trouble, searching for just one person and waiting around for them. Mum’s the same as me, and her and our father were as in love as anyone.” He tilts back in his chair. “But Fíli always had the Longing. He knew something was missing. And then one day, when Dori came ‘round to see Mum about some cloth, he brought Ori. He was a bit younger than us, and he wouldn’t talk, but Fíli says he just sort of knew right then. He says he looked at Ori, and the Longing was gone. He knew him.”

Bilbo raises an eyebrow. “Knew him?”

Kíli nods. “Story goes with Ones, when Mahal is carving your soul from the stones, he swings too hard and cracks the centre by mistake, so he places it in two bodies and breathes life into them both. And you’ll never feel whole until you find your other piece. Well, you know better than me, right?”

“Why would I?” Bilbo asks, confused, only it seems to confuse Kíli more.

“You’re Thorin’s One.” His eyebrows are drawn down in a confused look. “Didn’t you feel it, when you two met?”

Bilbo realizes suddenly where this conversation has gone wrong, and he takes a sip of his tea to cover his mistake, thinking of how to reassure Kíli while he does so. “It’s different with Hobbits, Kíli. And your Uncle didn’t exactly make the best first impression that night in Bag End. We were a bit of a slow burn.”

He can’t believe this. Kíli doesn’t know? What has Thorin let him and Fíli believe? Dís? Never mind Thorin’s anger over the damned kiss, Bilbo’s got more than enough to say about him deceiving the family about something so important.

“Huh.” Kíli, bless his heart, buys it, and starts sorting through the food until he finds the last chocolate biscuit. “Hobbits are odd.” This appears to be the end of that train of thought for Kíli. “Since Ori will be my brother now, do you think Dori will knit me a pair of gloves like his? I liked them for riding, kept the reins from bothering my hands.”

Bilbo highly doubts it. He’s rather sure the first thing Dori is going to do is try to throttle Fíli, no matter what Ori says.

“You could ask.” He says, instead of that. “In any case, it’s probably best you stay out of the way when the initial proceedings are going on.”

“Do I look stupid or something?” Kíli dunks his biscuit in his tea, and Bilbo lets him, deciding it’s not too bad when there’s no one to see it. “I wonder what Nori will ask for. What do you think?”

“Cloth, thread. A new loom, probably, since Ori is the youngest.” Bilbo says, closing his eyes for a moment to picture the rules of marriage he remembers scanning once, a few months ago. He didn’t remember the beads part, but he’d probably missed it. “And then he’ll use it all

to make blankets and rugs and things for a wedding gift to outfit their home. You know you're required to make something."

Kíli shakes his head. "Already done. I made it ages ago, back when he asked the first time." Bilbo's surprise must show, because Kíli rolls his eyes. "I do know how things are done, you know. We're not completely hopeless. I made Ori a quill knife, and I made their marriage beads already. I wanted to get it done and over with."

"That was clever of you." Bilbo praises. He'd planned to gift Ori with some paper, or a new set of quills. The quills will go with the quill knife nicely, so perhaps that'll do. "You're not going to give Fíli anything?"

"No, see, you only give the other family gifts," Kíli explains. "If I give Fíli something, that's like me saying Ori isn't worth him. Dori and Nori give gifts to Fíli to welcome him, and we give Ori gifts to welcome him into our family." He gestures with his spoon as he speaks, seemingly forgetting he still has it in hand. "See, since Fíli is a noble, and he's technically higher socially than Ori, we have to give his family things to sort of... well, it doesn't sound right in your language, but sort of to pay for him, since the 'Ri family will lose income, whereas they give small gifts to Fíli to sort of thank him, for the marriage. Only not exactly." He wrinkles his nose. "It doesn't sound right, in Common. Anyway, if Ori chose to stop being a scribe, Fíli would have to pay the Scribes' Guild anything left in his contract, but knowing Ori, he'll have none of that. He wouldn't like not having his Library and his books." He notices the spoon in his hand at last, and puts it down nicely on the napkin, smiling at Bilbo sheepishly. "Of course, what with you being the only Baggins, Thorin didn't have to do that, and since Thorin is the head of the family, there's no one you'd have to do that for either."

Bilbo smiles into his tea. "Our marriage isn't exactly proper, in any case."

Kíli just shrugs in response, hitching one shoulder while he puts a dollop of jam on a scone he's sliced in half. "Thorin's the king, he can do as he likes. Besides, it's a better story this way. Married you on death's door, and put his own ring on your finger. Even I think that's romantic."

He's suddenly tempted to tell Kíli the truth, that it's all just a story, a lie, to save Thorin from someone who might have stabbed him in the back at the first opportunity. That he's not really Thorin's One, and it breaks his heart every time he thinks about it. That he loves Thorin, that much is true, but Thorin loved someone long before he met Bilbo. That Bilbo's only had one kiss, just one.

He doesn't though, because Kíli is young, and a good story is a good story.

"Seems they're done," is what he says.

They all clear out eventually, the boys going off to their training, Nori and Ori back to their respective jobs, Dís back to the Guild Halls, and Thorin to a meeting with his generals. Bilbo appreciates the silence, once he's alone, the time to gather his thoughts. He writes to Dori, asking how he feels about a small party held in celebration for the engagement, before he brings the idea up with Dís. It's a good idea, killing two birds with one stone, but if Dori doesn't like it, there's little he can do.

He changes, and goes out into his garden. Once his hands are in the dirt, he feels better, his mind clearing even as the air turns chilly when the sun starts to creep down. His terrace is more northwest than northeast, so he gets a bit more light than if the other way, but the cold ends up more than he can stand after a time.

When he finally stands and strips off his gloves, he finds Thorin standing in the doorway.

“I think we should have a small party for the engagement,” he says, as he gathers his tools up. “That way Ori won’t want to crawl under a table, and when we invite Dáin and his council it will make them feel welcome. I’ve asked Dori how he feels about it, so we’ll have to wait for his answer, but overall, I think it’ll work. We’ll have to have Nori spread the story around as best as he can about them being together in Ered Luin, of course, so it doesn’t look like Fíli is snubbing Dáin to anyone who would mind.”

Thorin says nothing for a moment, but then he nods. “You always know how to smooth things over.”

“Like I told you, Hobbits are born diplomats.” He wants a bath, and supper. If this were any other night, he’d want Thorin to join him, but not tonight. He doesn’t want to face Thorin and his questions just yet. He doesn’t know what to say to him, how to explain himself should Thorin actually ask. “What do you want to give Ori’s family? I was thinking some cashmere wool should be included. It would please Dori, if anything.”

His husband smirks. “I doubt there’s anything that will please Dori at this point. Even in Ered Luin, he never made his disapproval a secret. I half think he followed me here not only to keep Ori away from Nori’s influence, but to watch him and Fíli more closely.”

Bilbo’s curious, so he asks. “He knows Fíli’s not the sort to play with Ori’s heart. He knows they think they’re each other’s One. Why does he fight it so hard?”

“Many reasons, mostly protective.” Thorin says, taking the bundle of tools from Bilbo to put them in their chest. “Ori is not like you, or me, or the boys. He’s happiest with his books, and he’s never been one for crowds, or for conversation. He tries, but it’s not in his nature.”

“It’s not in yours either.” Bilbo reminds him. “You hate other people.”

“I do not.”

Bilbo pokes his shoulder, smiling. “Yes, you do.”

Thorin sighs. “Yes, I do.”

“And yet you manage.” Bilbo wonders if there’s a maid about, but he finds supper waiting for him, and his fire built up. They brought it up for two, he notes, a little disappointed that he now has no escape. Tonight is beef, still steaming, with a mix of vegetables, red potatoes, and some soft brown bread with butter sitting to the side. The kitchen has become very thoughtful of him and his love of green food, and he’s thankful for it. Still, he’ll be happy to have things from his own garden, as a matter of pride.

His king has followed him in, throwing his coat over the couch by the big table. “Only because I have you, my Halfling. I would be adrift without you to keep things running smoothly.”

“You would find a way,” Bilbo replies, deciding whether he wants a quick bath or supper first. He needs to bathe, he decides. “You can start without me. I want to be clean first.” Besides the obvious, it’ll give Bilbo time to think if he takes his bath first. He’s quick though, some part of him not wanting to lose what time he can manage to spend with Thorin, even if he is upset with him over his lie to the family. Also, he’s hungry.

Thorin has waited for him, unsurprisingly, stirring the fire when Bilbo re-joins him in his dressing gown. When they sit to eat, he asks aloud what Thorin thinks of the marriage. “I know you said you approve, but really, are you alright with this?”

“I would not deny Fíli his One.” Thorin pokes at the vegetables sceptically.

They discuss the finer points of the engagement, as they finish their meal, and share a pipe while two servants clear the table. When they’re alone again, Bilbo finally asks the question he’s wanted to since Thorin confessed to having a One. “Did you ever meet yours? Your One, I mean?” Call it morbid curiosity, he thinks.

His husband watches him from his chair, until Bilbo looks away. He’s embarrassed that he’s not what Thorin wants, that he violated Thorin’s trust in such a way this morning. He doesn’t know whether he wants Thorin to bring it up or not, doesn’t know if he wants to bring up Thorin’s lie to the family. He does want to know who he’s not measuring up to though. “Yes. Very clever sort.” Thorin says finally, into the fire. “Very well-spoken. Well-read. Very unlike me. Exactly suited to fill in the spaces where I am weak or lacking. Perfect for me, in every way. I did not think I was capable of such love, until I met him.”

“Oh.” He doesn’t know what else to say, when his heart is breaking, when he knows he will cry very soon, if he sits in this room with Thorin for another moment. “I see.”

“Do you?” Thorin asks.

Bilbo nods tightly, wrapping his arms around himself as he stands. He feels like he might be sick, but that won’t do. Not at all.

“Bilbo?” Thorin is standing now too, one hand reaching out like he’s concerned.

He really is handsome, his husband, and oh, Bilbo loves him so. But all he will ever have is the kiss he stole this morning. What a clumsy thief he turned out to be, in any case.

“Forgive me,” he says, drawing away from the hand. He can’t bear Thorin’s touch right now. He’ll fall apart if he tries. “Forgive me, Thorin, I am not well. I think I should go to bed.”

He doesn’t look at Thorin, only hears him say, “Of course,” in a distant sort of way as he makes his way to his bedroom. He hears Thorin leave, the door shutting firmly, but it is only when he is curled in his bed, alone, that he allows himself to weep at last.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Things come to a head.

Chapter Notes

A/N (Falls on bed)
(Goes to sleep)
(I can't)
(Ask no more of me)

Thanks to my lovely beta, nomoreturns, for going over this mess and patiently fixing my terrible grammar.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The morning dawns, the same way it did the day before, only this time Bilbo is alone. His face feels strange from his tears, and his throat is sore. Mostly, he feels foolish over his ridiculousness. He's always known Thorin doesn't love him, it's not as though it's a surprise just sprung on him. He knew he loved Thorin in that tent when he said yes, knew he loved Thorin like he'd never loved anyone, enough to forgive him for his violence when he was in the throes of his madness.

So it's not as though he has any right to be upset about any of this.

He forces himself up and out of bed, too old to lie around and sulk. He washes his face and combs his hair and gets dressed in something he doesn't mind getting ruined. He's not needed this morning, and Dori won't come until the afternoon, so there's no harm in taking some time outside for himself.

The garden offers him peace of mind, at the very least. His tomatoes are coming up, and so are some of his herbs. His roses he mulches, but he can't bear to stay near them long, he finds, without his face getting hot. He wonders if roses mean the same thing to Dwarf culture they do to Hobbits.

Weeds have already started to find their way into things, and he has a respectable pile of dead nettle by the end of his weeding. He should add stinging nettle to his garden, he thinks, once he figures out what bed gets the most moisture. He'd like to dry some for tea. The variety when it comes to tea in Erebor is limited.

He sows a few more seeds once he's got the weeds up and out, morning glory and moonflower he'd placed in water the afternoon before. The little brown seeds have already split, with little white roots poking out, ready for the ground. The stone walls that flank his garden will look much lovelier with flowers covering them in both morning and evening. And one of his roses is a vine, so it'll climb on the other side.

Bilbo carefully presses lavender into the soil around them, and chides himself for it. Lavender and roses, what is he thinking?

“It's all looking quite lovely, Master Baggins.”

If Dáin had come any other time, any other day, Bilbo would be able to handle it.

Not now.

“I do not recall inviting you in here, Dáin.” He stands, and removes his gloves, laying them beside the little trowel he'd bought in town. The tools Thorin had crafted him remained in their wrapping today, Bilbo not quite strong enough to use them again. “I do not know how things are done in your mountain, but here, you ask before entering another person's private rooms.”

Dáin blinks, and looks back in. “Are these your private rooms? Mahal, no one told me. I thought it was your receiving room! Everyone was always traipsing through on my last visit.” He actually looks chastened. “My apologies, cousin, I had no idea I was intruding. Why did you not say something?”

Bilbo should have, but he really doesn't have a reason right now, he has a headache.

Dáin smiles, a bit concerned it seems, and approaches. “Are you quite well, Master Baggins?”

“I'm fine.”

“You don't look it. Has my cousin's sharp tongue turned on you now?” He grins. “He made me cry many times when we were children, especially over his sister.” When Bilbo raises an eyebrow, Dáin sighs with self-deprecating humour and explains. “I imagined myself quite in love with her Highness, when we were young. Thorin never let me hear the end of it. It all came to naught anyway, when she married the boys' father.”

He takes a turn about Bilbo's garden, making a great show of admiring his work, while Bilbo gets himself together. It's kind of him, and Bilbo sees why Thorin says the boys and him are a bit like each other. By the time he stands in front of Bilbo again, he feels a bit calmer, and ready to talk.

“Truly, I never meant to be rude, Master Baggins,” Dáin says, apologising again.

“What were you meaning?” Bilbo asks. “Beyond teasing Thorin?” For that is what he was up to when he handled Bilbo's gardening tools. Now that he truly sees the resemblance, it's

exactly something Kíli or Fíli would do to tease one another or someone else they judged too serious and solemn.

“To speak with you, of course.” Dáin sits down on the bench Thorin and Bilbo favour, hands dipping into mysterious places in his armour until he produces a pipe and a pouch of pipeweed and matches. “My cousin dislikes me, I know, no matter what he says, so I thought perhaps I could convince you of my complete and total lack of inclination to usurp Fíli.” He nods solemnly. “Especially after the pleasure of visiting your Guild Halls. I nearly had my beard cut off! No, I leave you all to it, and I will go home to my nice, orderly mountain. However, I would still like a good relationship between us all. We’re cousins, of a sort, after all.”

“We are.” Bilbo gets his own pipe and joins him, not minding his dirty knees.

“And also, I was hoping my fairer cousin might be with you in here, since she seems to favour your company,” Dain admits, a bit more sheepishly.

Bilbo actually laughs. Out of everything he thought Dáin might be doing, it honestly hadn’t occurred to him that Dáin had such simple intentions.

“It’s not that ridiculous,” Dáin says, around his pipe. “I have a mountain now! She might yet give me the time of day.”

“She might, she might,” Bilbo agrees. “And it would be a good marriage for our kingdoms, as I’m sure you know. Dís would get your generals under control, at the very least.”

Dáin laughs too, and leans to touch their foreheads together. “Ah, you are a good cousin for me, I think.” They sit back and enjoy their pipes together, Dáin looking around in interest. “I’ve never tried to garden. I’m not good at much, you’ll find, beyond being charming and fighting.” When Bilbo eyes him sceptically, he gets defensive. “You doubt me? Hm, dressed like this, I’d doubt me too. I must look ridiculous next to Thorin. He was always the more regal one.”

“He is very regal,” Bilbo agrees, ignoring the way his heart clenches at mention of Thorin. “There’s not many who could stand next to Thorin as an equal.”

“Spoken like a truly loving husband.” Dáin is looking at him very strangely, and Bilbo turns away. “He doesn’t deserve your devotion, not if he treats you so coldly all the time.”

“He doesn’t mean any harm by it.” Bilbo’s embarrassed that a stranger has seen so clearly into him, but there’s no point in lying. His head hurts, and Dáin, like the boys, has proven to be a keen observer of others. “I knew what I was getting into when I married him, you know.”

Dáin puts a hand on his shoulder, reassuring. Bilbo’s still not alright with how touchy Dáin is with him, but right now, he needs it. He feels terribly alone, even here with the family and his friends. He and Thorin might never recover the friendship they’d built, or the partnership they’d managed since their marriage, and he might be facing many a lonely evening now.

“Have you ever actually tried gardening, Dáin?” he asks, eager to change the subject.

“No, I have not.”

It turns out, he really isn't very good at it, but no one ever is at first. Dain's knees are as dirty as his, and his armour is discarded on the bench, as Bilbo patiently shows him how to mulch and fertilize each bed according to its different needs. Where he lacks in natural ability, he makes up in determination, frowning at the chore stubbornly.

It's nice, to have someone with him. He'd told Thorin he'd been fine alone, but only because he knew no one in Erebor would be terribly interested, and plants needed more than obedience to the King's Consort to help them grow strong. Having someone to talk to helped the time go by too, and as such, it's rather late in the morning when he realizes they're not alone.

Thorin is standing in the doorway, face hidden in the shadows. The sight of him is enough to sink Bilbo's happiness, as his mind vividly recalls the words he'd spoken the night previous, about his One. He should never have asked, should have told his damned curiosity to just sod off.

He stands and goes to Thorin anyway, his eyes not able to see much as they re-adjust from the bright sunshine to his dim sitting room. “What time is it?” he asks, removing his gloves. He hears Dáin groaning as he stands, not used to the kneeling position Bilbo had had him in.

“Late in the morning. I had hoped to speak with you before you see Dori.” There's something oddly strained to Thorin's tone. Bilbo wonders if he and Dís had it out over Fíli again, or maybe over Kíli and their idea of the lady from Dáin's council. “You already have company though, I see. I thought you said you needed no help?”

“I don't, but your cousin thought to try his hand at it and I wasn't opposed to the company,” Bilbo replies.

“If you had only asked,” Thorin insists, “I would have found you an assistant.”

Bilbo frowns, unsure of why he's being so obstinate, and where Dáin can hear. “I don't need help, Thorin.” He sees the time on his mantle, now that his eyes have adjusted, and he turns back to Dáin. “Forgive me, Dáin, but I must dress for a meeting.”

“Probably for the best,” Dáin replies with a shrug, as he puts his things back on. “I think I'm more hindrance than help. But perhaps I could join you tomorrow, and we could discuss the matter of Kíli and Lady Balar?”

Bilbo smirks at him. “I think that would require Lady Dís' presence.”

Dain grins. “The more the merrier.”

If he thinks he'll manage to charm Dís into a courtship, he's probably dead wrong, but Bilbo's content to let him try, and he thinks Dáin might be half-joking anyway. “Then I'll send for you if I have a free hour or so.”

“Looking forward to it.” Dáin seems to be struggling with his vambraces, and resorts to using his teeth to lace them. The gesture is oddly endearing, reminding him strongly of Kíli, and he smiles at it. “I hope your meeting goes well.”

“I wouldn't be so sure of that,” Bilbo jokes, and when Dáin is gone with a wave, he turns back to Thorin with a sigh. “Do you think Dori will be that difficult?”

Thorin's not listening. He's studying the garden, the tools laid out. Bilbo can't see his face, his back to him, but he can see him picking one up, studying it. “I thought you liked the ones I made you?” he asks, still in that strained voice. He and Dís must have had a row then, and now his pride is wounded by Bilbo not using his gift.

Frankly, Bilbo's not in the mood to accommodate him right now.

“I just grabbed the first set that came to hand,” he replies, perhaps more snappishly than he should. “Try not to sulk over it.”

Thorin puts whatever he has down. Bilbo waits for him to turn and be snide about being accused of sulking, but he doesn't. He doesn't do anything.

“Thorin?” he ventures, afraid he's gone too far. “Thorin, are you quite alright?”

“Dori will be here soon.” Thorin says, walking over to the roses instead of turning to Bilbo. Bilbo can see him touching one of the unopened buds, and wonders what he's thinking. “You should get cleaned up.”

He should, and really, he doesn't think being alone with Thorin is the best idea right now. So instead of asking after Thorin's sour mood, he goes and gets himself washed up and into clean clothes. After he's brushed his hair out, he re-joins Thorin in his sitting room, where his husband looks into the fire. Bilbo slips his ring on, from where he left it on the table for safekeeping from the dirt.

“Do I look presentable enough for Dori?” Bilbo asks, but Thorin doesn't look at him. “Thorin?”

His husband barely glances at him, and it hurts despite everything he reminds himself of. It's not as though he can expect Thorin, a Dwarf, to find his form pleasing. He's too small, too soft and smooth. His husband treats him like a child because he looks like a Dwarf child, and he should never have let himself hope Thorin would ever desire him as more than a friend.

He wonders, for the first time, if Thorin is having an affair to answer his own needs. It's never occurred to him that Thorin would ever be so unfaithful, but would it really be infidelity? Thorin owes Bilbo's heart no promises, after all, and it would be very easy, for him to find someone loyal enough to keep quiet.

“What did you want to speak to me about, Thorin?” He needs to let the idea go. It might very well be true. Thorin might indeed be having an affair of some sort, but if he is, Bilbo cannot fault him, can he? What if it's with his One? It would be cruel of Bilbo, then, to deny him the other half of his soul. “Dori will be here soon.”

“Do you know, I’ve forgotten,” Thorin says, his face darkening with the beginning of what Bilbo is sure to be an argument. The kiss, he remembers, and curses Thorin for choosing now to start with him.

There’s a knock at the door, stopping either of them from speaking before anyone says something they’ll regret. It’s Dori, when Bilbo opens it, looking very imperious. “Dori,” he tries to greet him, his heart not in it, but it’s not as though it matters. Dori’s not in the mood to be pleased, that much he knows, and can sympathize. Ori and Fíli had gone behind his back, after all.

“So now the damage is done, and Ori is bound to your sister-son for life,” Dori says, glaring at Thorin and Bilbo both. Nori is behind him, thankfully, shrugging at Bilbo behind his brother’s back.

“I’ve told you, dear brother-mine, to see it as us finally being on the right side of the sheets with the Line of Durin,” Nori announces teasingly, and when Dori turns his glare on him, he only grins rakishly. “You know it’s true. And think of the lovely loom we’re sure to be gifted with soon. I imagine it carved from the finest wood, and large enough for me to weave a story to tell our whole journey.” The hint is obnoxiously given, but Thorin doesn’t crack so much as a polite smile, and Bilbo finds himself unable to either. “My, my, I do believe we’ve walked in on a bit of a domestic,” Nori mutters, low enough only Bilbo can hear.

“It’s nothing,” Bilbo mutters back. “Sit, I have tea on the way.”

Thorin nods respectfully at both brothers at last, and steps away from the fire. “I must take my leave of you, I’m afraid, though I’m sure you would rather speak to him anyway. He is everyone’s favourite, it seems.”

Bilbo’s confused as to what that’s about, but he can’t very well ask in front of Dori and Nori, and Thorin’s left the room anyway, shutting the door a bit harder than necessary.

“That doesn’t look like nothing,” Nori drawls, eyebrows raised.

“Oh, mind your own.” Bilbo’s really not in the mood at all, and now his headache is worse. He wants to lie down. “And don’t bother having a go at me, I had nothing to do with this, and you know it. They’re both headstrong little idiots.”

“And if *someone* had let them court when a certain little prince had asked, the first... oh, I don’t know, dozen and a half times? We wouldn’t be in this mess,” Nori says, taking a seat.

“A dozen and a half times?” Bilbo’s astonished, and it shows. “Really?”

“Heads like rocks, the Line of Durin has,” Nori replies, perking up when their tea is brought in. Dori silently fumes and when Nori braces himself as the maid leaves, Bilbo thinks to do the same.

“Of all the stubborn, foolhardy, *ridiculous* things Fíli has done, this is the worst!” Dori all but shouts as soon as the door closes. “He engaged Ori without even trying to ask for mine or

Nori's permission, and if you think I will let this stand, that I will let Ori get swept up into this mess, you will have another think -"

"About that 'not having permission' thing," Nori interrupts, making a show of looking embarrassed. "That's perhaps not quite true."

Dori freezes. And turns. "Repeat yourself, little brother."

"I might or might not have told our dear sweet little brother that if a certain princeling asked for a union, he was free to consent." He points his spoon at Bilbo. "However, at no point did I say I was alright with Fíli climbing out his window in the wee hours of the morning." When Dori turns red, Nori taps the spoon against his lips in thought. "Hm. Forgot that was a secret."

Bilbo snorts, despite his poor mood and aching head. "Stop teasing your brother, before you're head of the family." When Nori innocently twirls the spoon, Bilbo reminds him, "You would inherit his responsibilities."

"Ooh," Nori says with a wince. "There's a distasteful thought."

"He was in his room?" Dori demands, a bit calmer than he looks. "They weren't courting," he insists.

"And whose fault was that?" Nori replies. "If you think Fíli wasn't in his room back in Ered Luin as well you, brother-mine, are crossing into serious denial." Despite his less-than-proper ways, Bilbo notes that Nori holds a teacup correctly, with a delicate touch. "There's nothing to be done now. He can't exactly throw off a prince. Fíli's liable to pitch a fit if he does, and we can't have our little heir acting like a spoiled brat in front of our," he drags his tongue over his teeth, "*esteemed* guests."

"Give Fíli more credit," Bilbo admonishes.

"No offense, Bilbo, but you don't know what it's like when your One rejects you." There's something bitter there, in Nori's voice. "There's no pain like it. It feels like someone's reached into your chest and ripped your heart into a thousand pieces."

Bilbo almost asks, but then he sees the defeated look on Dori's face and thinks better of it. "So then it's decided. They've been foolish, but we'll deal with that later. For now, we have to make the best of things." Dori sighs heavily and sits down at the table with Nori, waving his hand at Bilbo for him to continue. "We need to announce it formally. I was thinking something small though."

"Be best for Ori," Nori agrees.

"It would. He never could stand that kind of thing." Dori helps himself to tea at last. "I'm betting there's another reason though."

"We need to make Dáin's council feel like Thorin trusts them." Bilbo shrugs. "He doesn't, not by a long shot, but the gesture will be the same, and besides that, Dáin wants a good

relationship with Erebor. He's clever enough to know he needs to court the future king as well the current one.”

“And you and Ori, by extension.” Dori says. “Ori's favour sought by a king. This isn't exactly the future I'd hoped for for him.”

“Please, the only future we hoped for was a stable one.” Nori stirs in more sugar.

“If it helps the situation with Dáin,” Dori speaks over him easily. “Then it's two rocks with one swing. You're right, of course. We must make the best of things, for the time being.”

“There's the matter of the engagement gifts,” Nori reminds Bilbo. “And they better be good. I meant it about that loom.”

“I'm sure you did,” Bilbo replies dryly. “We'll see.”

Both brothers smile at him, and the loneliness Bilbo's felt since the night before, the one Dain was only able to lift by an inch, finally begins to come off his shoulders. He's missed his friends in the mountain, the quarrelling amongst the guilds enough to keep them all away. It reminds him a bit of a family reunion, actually. Squabbling and veiled insults and backstabbing on the outside, but perfectly reasonable to all involved.

“So,” he asks Dori, taking a seat. “How did you come to break that Grandmaster's nose?”

It's a good way to spend an afternoon, as far as he's concerned, and that night, he falls asleep easier than he thought he would.

In the days leading up to the party, and there aren't many, he spends his time either in his garden, or with Dís, occasionally with Ori and the boys in attendance, and sometimes Dáin if he can sneak away and knows Dís is present. He flirts outrageously with her, to her great annoyance, but she doesn't so much as put her hand on a weapon, so she's not bothered too much. More likely, it's a great game between them, and it makes Bilbo laugh.

Thorin does not come to his rooms, nor does he ask for Bilbo's presence again. Bilbo doesn't blame him, but he misses him all the same. Thorin may not love him, but he's his friend, or rather was. He keeps thinking of riddles for him, or looking forward to sharing stories with him about what the boys get up to throughout the day, like when Kíli manages to finally best Fíli at swords when they have an impromptu practice on Bilbo's terrace. But he can't now, he always reminds himself. He wonders who Thorin talks to at night now.

Again, he wonders just how faithful his husband is to him, and the thought hurts.

“Bilbo?” Ori asks, once, when Bilbo finds himself blinking back tears over one of his books, spread out on a blanket for their picnic. Nori is showing Kíli how to make a knife dance across his fingers, the bright sunshine catching the metal. “Are you alright?”

“Fine, just fine,” he lies, wiping at his eyes. “The dust in these books is unbearable.”

“Oh, yes,” Ori agrees. “You saw the poor Library!”

“I did.” It had been one of the first places Thorin had shown him, the great Library of Erebor, full of more books and scrolls and tapestry-stories than Bilbo had ever imagined, even if the tapestry-stories were fading and rotting, the scrolls dusty and crumbling away. It had still been beautiful. “How is the restoration going?”

“Better than we thought. We've had to rewrite quite a few scrolls, and all the tapestries that weren't in storage are ruined. Once the Weavers' Guild is working again, they'll replace them. Nori wants to weave our Journey for the Library, actually.” Ori looks back down at his own papers. “Do you think it'll be a good party?”

“I think it'll be fine,” he replies. “Are you ready?” He hopes Ori is. It's tomorrow evening.

“I think so. Fíli is a bit worked up over it. He couldn't sleep last night, and kept me up.” He blushes when Bilbo raises an eyebrow. “I didn't mean like that! Not that we could, really, he's been so tired, well, that is to say, not that he *couldn't*, I mean, oh,”

At this point, Kíli is listening, and looking very much like his birthday, Durin's Day, and the Solstice have all come at once.

“Kíli,” Bilbo warns. “No.” He looks disappointed, but Bilbo remains firm. “No, Kíli, not now.”

He bites his lip, then asks hopefully, “After Dáin leaves?”

“No.” The last thing they need is Kíli and Fíli fighting in the middle of the halls of Erebor, which they would. They're never more immature than when they're together. “And what do you mean, he couldn't sleep? Is he that worried?”

“He thinks he's going to make Thorin look bad in front of Dáin somehow.” Ori sighs, and starts to put his papers away. “I know he won't. I think even he knows he won't, not really. But it still nags at him until he's too restless to sleep.”

That sounds like Fíli. “You need to calm him then.”

“How?” Nori and Kíli both snort, and Ori balls up a piece of paper to throw at his brother. He nails him right in the head, the folds getting caught in Nori's elaborate hair. “For your information, that doesn't tire him out, Nori!”

Kíli makes a noise of pain and covers his ears, falling over dramatically while Nori winces. “More than I needed to know, little brother.” He picks the paper out of his hair and flicks it away. “Ever.”

“Then mind your own business!” Ori scowls at him, before turning back to Bilbo. “I can't exactly make him stop thinking. How do you get Thorin to calm down?”

Bilbo considers it, while he glares at Nori and Kíli, telling them to both find something else to occupy themselves with. They do, or pretend to, Nori going back to his knives, and Kíli back to the trick. “I talk to him,” he says, after a moment. “I let him talk about what's bothering him, until we find the root of it, and then we think of a way to fix it. Being married

to a king isn't just about appeasing advisers and their spouses, or being charming at parties. Part of your duty is to keep him sane, keep him reasonable, even when there's nothing to be reasonable about. He needs to trust you above all others." Like Thorin had trusted him, before.

And how much can Bilbo say he trusts Thorin, when he doubts him like he does?

He can admit to himself, in his own head, that their marriage might be ruined now. He should never have asked about Thorin's One, should never have kissed him. He should have let himself be content with their friendship, and kept himself to himself. He should have had an affair of his own, for pity's sake, to take the edge off.

"Fili always wants to talk to me," Ori says, seemingly happy about it. "Even when I didn't want to talk to him." He laughs.

"Back when Fili was stalking him," Kili says, dropping the knife for the hundredth time.

"Don't talk about your brother like that," Bilbo scolds.

"Well, he was," Kili mutters to himself.

Ori's still smiling. "Fili says I calm him down."

"Then you're off to a good start." At least this marriage will work, he hopes, and if he can help, he'll be happy with that. At least Fili and Ori actually get to be with the person they want to be with. "Ori, does anyone with the Longing ever marry someone not their One?"

He turns a bit more serious. "Yes, but it's not a good idea. The Longing is too strong. Can you imagine yourself married to anyone but Thorin? Isn't the thought painful?"

Ori too, Bilbo realizes. Oh, he and Thorin are going to have words over this. How dare he lie to their friends like this? It's not right! Bilbo had assumed they all understood the truth of the matter, that the marriage is just a way to save Thorin from a bad match, but no, apparently Thorin has let them believe that ridiculous story, that stupid lie.

But he can't tell the truth either, not when Ori is looking at him so hopefully.

As soon as Dain is gone, he and Thorin will discuss this, at length. *Loudly*.

"I suppose I understand what you mean," Bilbo deflects. "In any case, we need to discuss the party, and how you and Fili are going to need to behave, and yes Kili, you need to listen too." The youngest prince groans, but starts listening.

Bilbo's hoping to have another party as well, actually, here, on his terrace. A much smaller one, with just their friends and family. He thinks Ori will like that much more, and Fili too.

It's that party he looks forward to the next night, when he's dressing for the first. Thorin's going to wear blue, he knows, so he chooses blue too. Even when they're upset with one another, they're still bloody married, and they still have to make a good show of things to Dain and his lot.

His ring he leaves for last, sliding it on with a sigh. A ring from Thorin's own hand. It really is romantic.

When Thorin comes to escort him, flanked by Dís and Kíli, he is indeed wearing blue, a darker shade than Bilbo's own choice of waistcoat and jacket. It makes his hair all the darker, and his eyes all the brighter, and something in Bilbo aches. Thorin doesn't say much, leaving the talking to Dís and Kíli, who both thankfully have plenty to say. Dís instructs her son on how to conduct himself with Lady Balar, reminding him that it only takes one bad experience to sour a relationship in the beginning, and if he souring it, she'll have his braids on her wall.

"Mum," he complains. "She likes me, alright? I can handle this." When his mother starts fussing over his braids, he shies away. "On my *own*, Mum."

Thorin places a large hand over the one Bilbo has on his arm when they enter the room, something dark in his eyes Bilbo doesn't much like. His hand is heavy, his eyes darting about the room until he finds what he's looking for, but Bilbo can't see what. Either way, his hand tightens over Bilbo's, hard enough his ring must be digging into his palm, but if it is, he doesn't show it.

"Your Highness, don't you look stunning?" Dáin is smiling first at Dís and then at Bilbo, giving them both the compliment. Dís is unimpressed, but Bilbo smiles.

"Thank you, Lord Dáin. You look nice as well." He does, and Dís does seem to notice, beneath her scowl.

"Charming as always. I'm sure your first dance is spoken for," Dain nods respectfully to his cousin. "But perhaps I could have the second?" Dáin's looking to cause trouble, but Bilbo's grateful for it. Anything to dance with someone other than Thorin, someone he can actually look at without wanting to cry.

"Of course." He turns to Dís. "Her Highness needs a partner for the first dance as well." The look Dís is giving him promises slow and painful death, but she manages a smile. Well, her teeth show behind her beard and her hand isn't on her sword. Close enough.

"I would be happy to oblige." Dáin bows to her with almost too much cheek, and Bilbo swears he sees a twitch in the corner of her mouth.

"I'd be grateful, Lord Dáin."

Bilbo is smiling, but it fades when he sees the look on Thorin's face. He's murderous. Does he dislike the idea of Dáin courting Dís that much? Dáin had said he'd teased him when they were children, but maybe he really had disapproved of the idea. "Thorin, they're about to announce Fíli," he reminds him, to get his thoughts away from it. Dís married to Dáin would solve a lot of problems, honestly, and Thorin will just have to deal with it.

"Oh, I've been waiting for this," Dáin says, turning to the doors.

Balin enters first, with Nori and Dori flanking. Dáin, ever the flirt, Bilbo suspects, raises his eyebrows in interest. He's come to understand that by Dwarf standards, Dori is considered the

ideal, and ever since Erebor has been reclaimed, he's turned more than one head. Nori is considered handsome as well, and Ori is too.

“They're both taken,” Dís says dryly, giving Dáin a look.

“As though I could ever turn my eyes from my one true desire,” Dáin jests, and Dís rolls her eyes.

Now Fíli enters, his hair golden in the torchlight, made still brighter by the green he wears. He looks very much a prince of legend, and on his arm, Ori, more subdued in mostly grey with just a little green, and yes, his ever present knitted gloves. He's having a hard time looking up at the room, but Fíli is clearly enjoying every second of it.

“Well, I can see why one of mine would be thrown over for that,” Dáin says, eyes wide. “Does their whole family look like that?”

“Don't be too disappointed, Dáin,” Dís says. “Many a heart's been broken by the Line of 'Ri, even a few from the Line of Durin.”

Bilbo breathes a sigh of pride and relief at seeing Fíli so admired, at seeing them both happy, and finds himself leaning on Thorin before he can stop himself. It's a natural gesture, for him, to want to touch Thorin, be near him. When he's not thinking about it, it's all too easy to turn into him like a sunflower following the sun in its adoration.

The hand on his seems to hesitate, and that's what snaps him out of it. He stands straight again, and looks anywhere but at Thorin.

Even Dáin's advisors look impressed, some at least noticing the beads that show Ori's a master in the Scribes' Guild. He's young to be a master, and it's impressive. And he seems to be speaking to people, when various lords and ladies step forward to greet them and offer congratulations. Dori still looks like he wants to fuss, but he's keeping his distance, choosing to speak with Balin instead.

“He does look so happy,” Dís sighs. “I'm glad it all came to something, in the end.”

“He would have pursued him across the sea if he had to.” Thorin chuckles. “Do you remember the time those boys took Ori's sketchpad?”

Dís laughs, while Dáin and Bilbo both listen. “Oh, you haven't heard that story?” It seems like it's a good one, and when Dwalin suddenly appears between Dís and Thorin, he chuckles too.

“Which story are we telling about him? Is it the time when he made Ori cry?” Dwalin asks, a little too eagerly.

“No, but I like that one too,” Thorin says, the two of them exchanging a mischievous look that is a little too reminiscent of Fíli and Kíli for Bilbo's comfort.

The princess is grinning as she tells it, looking at her beloved son the whole time. “Ori's always been small, and never much interested in weapons. One day, these boys, big lads, they

took his sketchbook and wouldn't give it back,"

"So Fíli borrowed a hammer from me, and went after them." Dwalin's grin is huge behind his beard. "Knocked them all off their feet. I was right proud of him."

Thorin finishes the story, as Dáin laughs openly. "But then of course he ruined the gesture by opening his mouth. No sooner had he given it back, he told Ori that he shouldn't look like a target, all alone. Incompetent boy was trying to hint maybe he should have some company, but Ori took it to mean Fíli thought he was weak. He wouldn't speak to him for nigh on a month. I thought the lad would never stop sulking."

"But it looks like he convinced him in the end, so all's well that ends well." Dáin says.

"Never thought he would, after, you know the time I'm talking about, the time he made Ori cry right after he came of age—" Dwalin starts, but stops when he realizes the pair is now within earshot.

Fíli looks offended, his mouth open. "It was once! And he forgave me!"

"He sent me some very nice paper," Ori agrees.

Kíli appears, throwing an arm around his brother's shoulders. "Be grateful for that, by the way. We spent two hours in the shop choosing it, and even then, he almost went back and exchanged it."

Fíli looks murderous, but the story seems to charm Ori, because he rests against Fíli a bit more. It's a sweet picture, as Fíli smiles down at him, like he can't quite believe Ori's beside him.

Bilbo does not look at Thorin.

"The first dance is starting," Dáin extends a hand to Dís. "My lady?"

"Oh, very well then," she agrees, and allows him to lead her out. Ori needs no leading, as he pulls on Fíli's arm, looking excited for the first time.

Before Bilbo can remind Kíli he needs to ask Balar, she's already appeared beside him, grabbing him by the elbow. "Come on then, put your gold where your mouth is and show me this footwork you promised."

"Well now, there's a welcome development," Dwalin says, once they're gone. "She'd be a good match for him. She's got a reputation already. No name for herself just yet, but give her time."

"Strong children for the Durin line," Bilbo agrees, not as seriously as Dwalin and Thorin seem to be taking the idea. "Don't you have a partner, Dwalin?"

"I'm not much of a dancer, Master Baggins." He claps Thorin on the back. "But your lord husband here is." It's a hint that Thorin takes, and he finally leads Bilbo to the dancers. The music is lively, but appropriate for such a small gathering, and they fall in line easily. Dwarf

dances have no leader, the partners expected to move equally together, and thankfully here at least they still manage to work well together.

“You've been in the sun,” Thorin says. “How does your garden look?”

Bilbo concentrates on his balance, their height difference meaning he needs to be careful or he'll be swept up off his feet by Thorin. “Very fine, thank you.” There's a spin, and Thorin lifts him enough he's on the balls of his feet.

“How is Ori holding up?” Another spin, and he's pressed too hard against Thorin's chest, but there's no way to put space between them when they're dancing like this. “He looks happy.”

“He *is* happy.” Bilbo confirms. “He's happier than I've ever seen him.” They pass the pair, and Ori's laughing at something Fíli's said. “So is Fíli.” He finally gets his feet back on the ground solidly, but it doesn't help much. “It must be wonderful, to find your One.” Thorin forgets his strength again, and Bilbo's feet do leave the ground briefly.

“Yes. It is, when things go right.” Things hadn't gone right for Thorin of course, and when will this dratted dance end? “The feeling of your soul being whole again, knowing you've found the one you've been searching for since before you can remember. It's indescribable.”

Bilbo keeps his composure by watching his feet. “It sounds very nice.”

“*Nice?*” Thorin asks, and his grip on Bilbo's hand tightens. “Is that the best word you can think of to describe it?”

“Well how would I know? Hobbits don't have Ones!” He snaps, keeping his eyes away from Thorin's.

His husband goes quiet, and doesn't say another word until the dance is finished. Bilbo's offended him now, and he intends to go off on his own as soon as possible, if he knows Thorin. He scolds himself internally, angry that he had to choose Fíli's damned engagement party to lose his temper with Thorin. It's not fair to either of the boys, and now Thorin will be in no mood to improve their relationship with Dáin's council.

“Thorin,” he tries, when they finish.

“I must speak with Balin.” He dismisses him easily, and Bilbo has to bite the inside of his mouth to keep himself from saying anything. “Dance with who you like.”

It's deliberately cruel, and Thorin actually looks like he regrets it for a second, before his face closes back off and he leaves Bilbo standing there alone. Not for long, thankfully, as he finds himself caught up in Dáin's orbit, the big Dwarf pulling him in close to compensate for their height difference. He leads, but subtly, and Bilbo's grateful. He really doesn't have the concentration for it right now.

Dáin, for once, isn't smiling. “Husband or not, he doesn't have the right to speak to you like that.”

“You're overstepping, Dáin.”

“Maybe,” he agrees. “But I’m not wrong.”

He’s not, but Bilbo doesn’t say anything.

“Come, Master Baggins,” he continues, “You must smile. Your sister-son is engaged, to his One, and you’ve thrown a lovely party for him –” he twirls them, “– and if you do not smile, I will be blamed, and then we will fall to war. Or Dís will assassinate me.” He seems so torn between the options that Bilbo can’t help but smile. “Ah, there we are. A happy Consort of Erebor, here to charm and woo the worst I can throw at him. By the way, might you have need for a new treasurer? Only Lord Wrain gives me a headache,” now Bilbo laughs, and Dáin grins. “I told you, the only thing I’m good at is being charming and fighting.”

“I’ve seen evidence of both now,” Bilbo says amiably. “Does any of it work on Dís?”

“I did make her laugh,” Dáin says, making it sound like a grand victory. “I remain optimistic about my future chances. She was very impressed with my attempts at gardening, so I thank you, dear cousin. She may yet give in, one day.”

“She might also have you killed in your sleep,” Bilbo replies, chuckling.

“Ah,” Dáin leans in, smiling. “The things a Dwarf will do for love.”

Bilbo laughs as Dáin spins him, lifting him off his feet, and then the dance ends. He bows to Bilbo, ever the courtly lord, and Bilbo finds himself led around the floor by Kíli, his nephew laughing as he chatters about Balar and her wit and how she threatened Kíli with an axe when he invited her to see his rooms.

“I like her,” he announces. “I like her very much, Uncle Bilbo.”

“I’m glad.” Kíli’s too tall for him, and after one turn, he stops making a pretence, and actually picks Bilbo up, like he’s a child, his strength and height meaning Bilbo is a good six inches up off the floor. “Kíli!”

“Oh shush, help me keep time,” Kíli makes a show of humming along to the song. “One-two-three, one-two-three,”

“Kíli, it’s a four-step dance!”

“That explains why we’re doing so badly compared to everyone else,” Kíli looks around in fake astonishment. “I’m just hopeless. You’ll have to lead me around by the beard the rest of my life, or I’ll bring about the ruin of Erebor. No helping it.”

“You’d have to grow a beard first.” Bilbo reminds him, and Kíli scowls mockingly back at him.

“Such a sharp tongue on such a soft creature.” He spins them without caring about the dance, then puts Bilbo down so he wobbles uncertainly until Fíli takes his brother’s place.

“I see your mischief now,” Bilbo warns the prince, who grins at him. “You two are conspiring against me.”

“Only conspiring against Uncle,” Fíli replies, shooting Thorin a sharp look. “Why is he so taciturn tonight? Did you and he quarrel?”

“You could say that.” Bilbo feels awful, now that he knows Fíli has noticed. “I’m sorry, we should have behaved better, tonight. This party was for you and Ori.”

Fíli shrugs good-naturedly, and looks over to where Balin is dancing with Ori. “I don’t care. Ori said yes, finally. That’s all that matters right now.” He spins Bilbo, grinning. “He said yes. Do you know how much work it took? It took him years to even *like* me.”

“I’m happy for you.” Bilbo says, and he is. He really is.

The dance finishes, and he dances with Dáin twice more, then Dís for two turns, and Kíli for the last two before he’s done. “Enough,” he begs, when Fíli approaches. “Dance with your intended. He’s who you want anyway.” It’s true, and he watches with a fond smile as Fíli begs Ori for one more dance that turns into three. They both look tired, by the end, but they both look happy, beyond happy, for the last dance the musicians play. They play a slow ballad, one that goes on long enough that anyone can see Fíli rest his forehead against Ori’s, can clearly see him mouth “I love you,” as the music dies. Even Lord Wrain looks a bit taken in by it all, his husband smiling up at him adoringly.

It’s all very sweet and romantic and it makes Bilbo’s heart ache painfully. He’s glad when the night is over, and he can wish Fíli and Ori both all his love and best wishes with Thorin and Dís. He’s eager for his bed, and the quiet of his room.

“Best wishes,” Lord Dáin says, when he says good-night to Bilbo, pressing his forehead to Bilbo’s. “And I may have overstepped, but I was not wrong.” Bilbo smiles up at him politely, and withdraws.

There’s a bath drawn for him already, and he sinks into the hot water gratefully, washing away the smell of smoke and sweat from the dancing. Once he’s clean, he comes out to his sitting room, intending on enjoying a pipe before bed, but he finds he has company.

Thorin stands in front of his fire.

“I’m tired,” Bilbo says, instead of a proper greeting. “Whatever you want to shout at me about tonight, get it over with.”

His husband’s face twists into something furious, something Bilbo has not seen since the day he held Bilbo over the wall by his throat, threatening him with death for his betrayal. “Are you expecting another visitor on this night? You wish me gone, so as not to make things awkward?”

Bilbo frowns. “What are you on about?” he asks, unkindly. “Who else would invite themselves into my rooms this late?”

“I don’t know, husband. Why don’t you tell me?”

Thorin's quite serious, he sees, and he almost laughs. "Have you gone mad, again?" he mocks. "Do you plan on hanging me over the side of my garden? If so, please, let me change into something more fitting."

Thorin's face drains of colour. "You think I would do that?"

"You did it once," Bilbo reminds him. "What is your point here tonight, Thorin? Do you want to have a go at me for the liberty I took? Get it over with then. I want to go to bed." When his husband still says nothing, just stares at him, he all but shouts himself, "What is it, Thorin?"

It's only, he's had enough. He really has. He's had enough of being in love with Thorin, of watching Thorin with a longing that breaks his heart, of knowing that Thorin can't ever love him back. That he's stuck in this marriage now, and even with all the pain it brings him, he still can't imagine ever being with anyone else. He's tired of feeling so alone, of all of this mess. He suddenly wants to be back in the Shire, in his comforting Bag End, the home he was raised in. He wants to be in the garden his mother planted, using the plates she used, in the kitchen his father built for her.

He wants to be anywhere but here.

"What do you want?" Bilbo asks again.

His husband, his king, is still looking at him with that dark, unreadable expression, as he says, "The things I want, Bilbo, you could not begin to imagine." He approaches, his hands clasped behind his back. "But I will demand you remember the vows you made to *me*, on the battlefield, and that it is *my* ring you wear on your finger, and that *I* am your husband, myself, and no other Dwarf, no other creature in the whole of Middle Earth, and I would demand that you stay to those vows!" He doesn't touch Bilbo, but he clearly wants to, and Bilbo instinctively withdraws. "You married me! You swore fidelity to me!"

"Yes, believe me, I'm very aware of the fact we're married, Thorin!" Bilbo shouts back.

"Are you?" Thorin is loud enough they'd be heard through any doors not of Dwarvish make by this point. "Is that why you throw your affair in my face?" He still does not touch Bilbo, but he is very close. "I will allow you as much freedom as I can, Bilbo, but not this! You ask too much of a Dwarf!"

"Affair?" Bilbo's torn between insulted and shocked, unsure of which way he leans more. "With who?"

"You let him in your garden, where you don't allow even me, and you laugh with him when you have nothing kind to say to me." Thorin seems genuinely hurt, but Bilbo still can't fathom what he's on about. "I can't, Bilbo." His tone is pleading now. "I can't see you with him. I can't bear it. Don't ask it of me. I'll kill him first."

Bilbo can't for the life of him work out who Thorin is talking about, but he knows enough to know he should be offended. "You great, stupid creature!" He raises his voice again, temper snapping, "There's only one person with any invitation to my bed, and it's you, not that you've ever seen fit to act on it!"

He regrets it as soon as he's said it. It's too much, for either of them. Bilbo retreats, one hand over his mouth in shock at his own daring.

"Forgive me, Thorin," he says, in a more even tone. "I should not have said that."

His husband is staring at him like he's never seen him before. "What do you mean by that?"

"Thorin,"

"What do you mean?"

Bilbo looks at the fire, because it's easier. "I'm not having an affair, Thorin, whatever you may think. How could I, when I love you so?"

"Bilbo," Thorin sounds astonished, and Bilbo doesn't blame him.

"I'm sorry," he says. "I thought it would be enough, to be by your side. The other morning, when I kissed you, I was just, I was half-mad from it, you know, it's not easy, to be beside the one you love and know they'll never -"

His words are caught and stopped forever against Thorin's mouth, as his husband grabs him, one hand at Bilbo's waist, the other on his jaw, and kisses him. Thorin kisses him again and again, until Bilbo's hands wander into Thorin's dark hair, his fingers tightening and twining through it. Within, the pain he's carried for longer than he knows eases, subsides, until it's nothing but a memory, as his husband holds him close, like a lover should, like a true husband should.

"Halfling," Thorin says, after a time. "*My Halfling*, have you not realized the pain you've put me in?"

Bilbo shakes his head, confused, his hands still in Thorin's hair.

"All this time, I thought you didn't love me at all, not the way I loved you,"

He's confused. "But you have a One, you said so,"

"I said he was very well-read, very well-spoken, very clever." Thorin brushes a finger down Bilbo's cheek reverently. "Who does that describe?"

Oh, Bilbo thinks. *Oh*. "I'm your One." He says aloud, and Thorin nods.

"Yes, Bilbo." He leans back in. "You're my One."

They kiss again, but Bilbo manages to get his wits back enough to ask, "Why didn't you say?"

"I thought I had," Thorin replies. "And you turned away. I thought you were rejecting me."

Bilbo tugs on his hair hard in punishment, even as he kisses him again. "You stupid Dwarf, how could I reject you?" A thought occurs to him. "Did everyone know? Kíli? Dís?"

His husband looks a little embarrassed. “Perhaps.”

“Oh, we will have *words*, Thorin Oakenshield, about that, many, many words. Later.” Then he kisses him, over and over, lets Thorin lift him up off his feet. His weight is nothing to Thorin, he knows, and besides, it gets them back to his bedroom faster, the doors shutting behind them somehow. He doesn’t see, his eyes half-closed and focused on Thorin.

Thorin puts him down, and grabs at the knotted belt of his dressing gown, undoing it so the garment hangs loose, before he pushes it off Bilbo’s shoulders. “You have no idea,” he says, into Bilbo’s neck. “How cruel you’ve been to me, walking around in your nightclothes in front of me.”

“I’m so sorry,” Bilbo can’t manage much more, when Thorin is putting his teeth to work in such a way.

“You should be.” He’s gathered the fabric of Bilbo’s nightshirt up in his hands, lifting it up. He hesitates at Bilbo’s thighs, so Bilbo finishes the job, and stands naked in front of his husband for the first time.

For so long, he’s thought Thorin didn’t desire him.

He sees now how very, very wrong he’s been.

“Get undressed,” he orders, before Thorin can throw him on the bed like he so clearly wants to. “I want to see you. All of you.” He helps the process along, unlacing Thorin’s vambraces, and unbuckling his belt, and pushing him down on the bed so Bilbo can get his boots off, leaving them lying on the floor. Thorin’s last bits of clothing, his tunic and trousers, come off easily, and his husband sits bare in front of him.

“Come here.” Thorin takes him by the hands, then the thighs, lifting him up into his lap to straddle him. “My burglar, my Halfling,” he breathes. “My husband.”

“*Your* husband,” Bilbo confirms. “Only yours, Thorin. Just like you are mine.”

“Only yours,” Thorin replies, settling them back in the bed. “And only mine.” He sounds reverent, and it makes Bilbo’s stomach hurt. “I have lost so much time with you, my love, by not telling you the truth.” He kisses him again, and Bilbo almost starts to cry, but he’s not sure why. “I should have told you that day, in that blasted tent. I should have told you I loved you.”

Bilbo shakes his head. “You’re as much to blame as I am. We’re both very foolish.” There’s another kiss that ends with him on his back and Thorin settled between his thighs. “So very foolish.”

“Yes,” Thorin says, and that’s the end of talking.

The sky is still dark through Bilbo’s windows when he finds himself with his head pillowed on Thorin’s chest, Thorin holding him close. He idly matches their breathing, his inhale to Thorin’s, but finds it won’t work. Maybe because Thorin’s chest is bigger than his, Thorin’s

lungs taking in more air. It doesn't matter, he supposes, winding his fingers through Thorin's long hair. Nothing matters but this.

"Hobbits do not have Ones," Thorin says, his hand in Bilbo's curls.

"Not your average Hobbit, no," he replies. "But I am not your average Hobbit. And I know that I ache when I am without you. I think it might be that Longing you speak of." Thorin's hair in the firelight is still black, but the grey is silver, burning bright. "You're my One, Thorin, as much as a Hobbit can have a One."

Thorin sighs with something that feels like profound relief, the hand on Bilbo's head heavy.

Bilbo licks his lips, then says, almost smiling, "You thought I was having an affair with Dáin."

"Can we not discuss it?" Thorin begs, closing his eyes. "I'd rather forget what insanity jealousy drove me to."

"You know he's in love with your sister?" Bilbo teases, unable to help himself.

His husband groans. "Yes, which makes my accusation all the more idiotic."

Bilbo smiles, and rests against him again. He's very warm and happy right now. "I thought you might be having an affair. With your One."

"The only affair I was having with my One was in my head." His hand leaves Bilbo's hair to trail down his spine, raising a shiver in Bilbo. "It was a very torrid sort of affair."

"Was it?"

Thorin chuckles beneath him. "It was mostly centred around your garden. I thought to have a couch brought out there, sometimes. Other times, I thought about dragging you into my lap and just satisfying the both of us that way."

"Maybe in the morning," Bilbo sits up, so he can kiss Thorin. "I'll consider it." He kisses him again. "Or maybe I'll keep you here. As you said, we've lost so much time. I'd like to make it up, as soon as possible." Thorin keeps him close, for another kiss. "As quickly as possible."

Thorin shakes his head. "I have to be up early in the morning." He looks rather put out about it, actually. "I cannot escape back to you until the evening." The hand on his spine dips lower, and lower, until it's not on his spine at all.

"Thorin..."

"Perhaps the afternoon, if I rush things," Thorin promises.

Bilbo's tempted to say yes, but he shakes his head. "Don't rush things." They settle back on the bed together, but Bilbo puts his head comfortably on the pillow instead of Thorin's shoulder. "We have time for that sort of thing. Time for us to have a lie-in. For us to be in the

garden.” Thorin turns on his side, and puts a possessive hand on Bilbo's waist. “For you to have a couch put in the garden.”

Thorin laughs.

Chapter End Notes

Hahahaha five chapters I knew I could do it hahahah I'm going to go pass out now good night

Thank you everyone. You've all been wonderful, truly so.

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